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# GUNSLINGERS OF THE GANGSTER ERA

THE  
ROARING  
'20s

## BOOTLEGGERS BANK ROBBERS & BULLETS

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THEY STOLE  
THOUSANDS  
TOP ROBBERS  
OF THE ERA

STRATEGIES,  
METHODS  
OF THE  
TOP G-MEN

GANGSTER  
FIREPOWER  
THE LUGER

THE STORY  
BEHIND THE  
MOST SKILLED  
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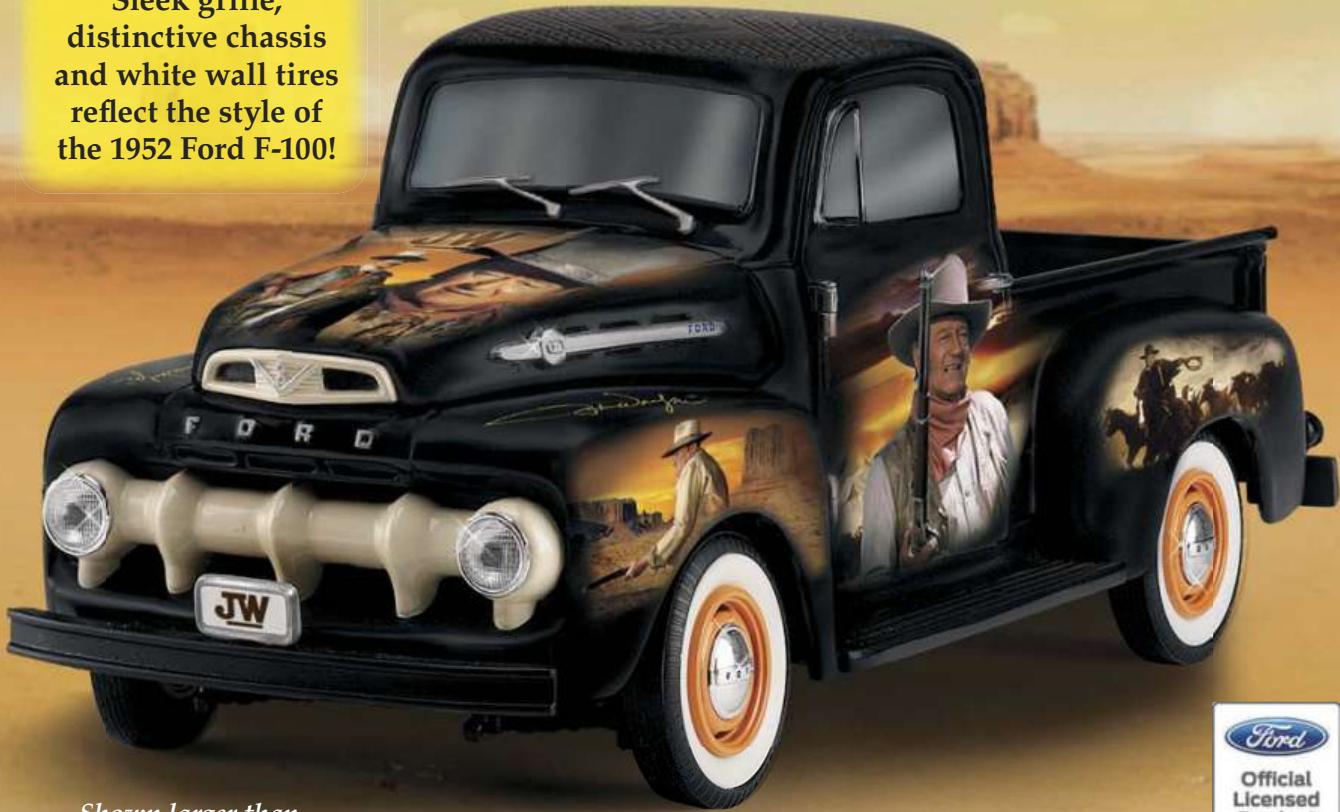
- Browning's Automatic Rifle
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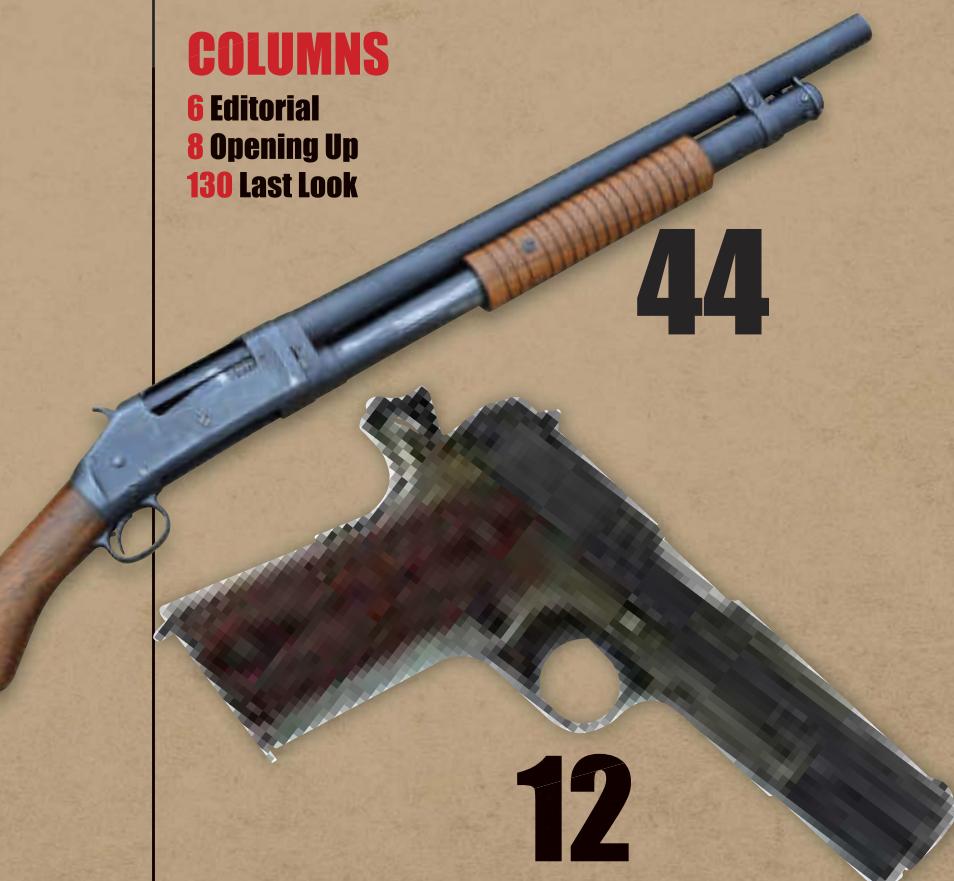
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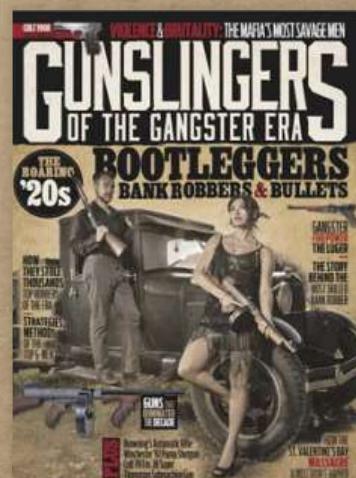
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# GANGSTER MANIA

There have been many non-fiction books documenting the lives and misdeeds of the lawless characters of the Prohibition and Great Depression periods. Movies about bootleggers, bank robbers and mobsters, whether depicting characters real or imagined, have tended to be popular over the years too.

This publication is just the latest look at the cops and robbers of the 1920s and 1930s, and I found myself fascinated with the subject as we were putting it together.

Just what is the attraction to these people from this volatile period of American history? For people who lived during that era, I suppose there was a certain admiration for those who boldly rebelled against government authority. Restricting personal freedom is usually not a popular thing among the masses. Dictating what a person could pour into a drinking glass was sure to generate a backlash.

Late in the period, amid all the poverty, when people were struggling just to have enough to eat, there had to be some "wow" factor in the way these outlaws were grabbing the easy money.

But the loss of innocent lives was not a popular occurrence and good people were too often caught in the crossfire as greedy hoodlums battled over their turf. As a result, there was an admiration, too, for the heroic lawmen, often out-gunned, who opposed the factions of brazen killers.

Among people today who look back on the gangster era, I suppose there is still some cheering for those good guys who showed courage in the face of danger to stop the outlaw gangs. Of course pop-culture celebrities who make it out of rehab are seen as heroes to people today, so go figure.

Undoubtedly, people are attracted to the excitement, the action, the adventure, the escape from the routine and the mundane. It's the same reason we watch the television news.

There are less philosophical reasons why the gangster era is so appealing, too. For firearms enthusiasts—and I am one—there are all the cool guns. While I like my polymer-framed Glocks, there's a certain touch of class about pulling a Colt 1911 or Colt 1908 Pocket Hammerless from beneath the jacket of a double-breasted suit. And what gun guy today wouldn't like to fire a Thompson submachine gun?

**"...good people  
were too often  
caught in  
the crossfire as  
greedy hoodlums  
battled over  
their turf."**

There were the cool fedora and Panama hats, too. Men wouldn't step outside without their heads covered in those days. I would love to wear hats such as those and forever give up my ball caps.

So here is our Gunslingers of the Gangster Era publication. You can say "wow" to the mobsters' exploits, cheer for the brave lawmen and read about all the cool guns. And yes, in the photos you might see some fedoras.

Steven Paul Barlow, editor



## GUNSLINGERS OF THE GANGSTER ERA

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Bogart (left) and Cagney in Angels With Dirty Faces

# MOVIE GANGSTERS

BY STEVEN PAUL BARLOW / PHOTOS FROM MOVIE STILLS DATABASE

## TOP MOVIES ABOUT THE GANGSTER ERA THEY WEREN'T AUTHENTIC, BUT THEY WERE FUN TO WATCH

**I**s that a gun in your hand or just the remote control to your DVD player? It's time to look at the top 20 films of all time depicting the gangster era. Okay, I couldn't stop at 20, so my list has 26 movies. Even then I missed some good ones.

Your list might be different. Mine was compiled with no regard to box office receipts or critical acclaim. These are simply movies about old-time gangsters that I like.

I did, however, follow these few guidelines:

1. The movies had to be set in the "Fedora Era" of the 1920's and 1930's. I made exceptions for films set in the 1940's because they had the same look and feel (and they still wore the hats).
2. Preference was given to black & white films. Why? I find it easier to enter that dark world of gangsters and guns when viewing an old black & white movie. Again, I made a few exceptions.
3. I decided not to list them in any particular order as I might rate them differently on any given day.
4. I decided to finish up on a lighter note by including some comedies about gangsters toward the end.

### TOP GANGSTER FLICKS

#### 1. **Scarface (1932)**

– Paul Muni, Ann Dvorak, George Raft, Boris Karloff.

#### 2. **The Roaring Twenties (1939)**

– James Cagney and Humphrey Bogart are bootleggers.

#### 3. **The Public Enemy (1931)**

– James Cagney, Jean Harlow

#### 4. **Manhattan Melodrama (1934)**

– Clark Gable, William Powell, Myrna Loy. This is the one Dillinger watched the night he was killed outside the Biograph theater.

#### 5. **The Petrified Forest (1936)**

– Humphrey Bogart, Leslie Howard, Bette Davis. Gangster on the run Duke Mantee (Bogart) holds diner patrons hostage.

**1****2****3****4**

**1.** Faye Dunaway poses as Bonnie Parker in *Bonnie and Clyde* **2.** Bruce Willis is the Last Man Standing **3.** Tom Hanks in *Road to Perdition*  
**4.** Lawless, more about country bootleggers than big city gangsters

**6. The Killers (1946)** – Burt Lancaster, Ava Gardner. “Kitty is innocent. Say it. Kitty is innocent!” Those lines helped to make Gardner a star. Great movie about a heist with double-crossing crooks.

**7. City Streets (1931)**

– Gary Cooper, Sylvia Sidney, Paul Lukas.

**8. Angels With Dirty Faces (1938)**

– James Cagney, Humphrey Bogart, Pat O’Brien, Ann Sheridan and the Dead End Kids

**9. The Glass Key (1942)**

– Alan Ladd, Veronica Lake, Brian Donlevy. Dirty politicians and gangsters. Great on-screen chemistry between Ladd and Lake.

**10. This Gun for Hire (1942)**

– Alan Ladd, Veronica Lake, Robert Preston.

**11. Last Man Standing (1996)**

– Bruce Willis, Christopher Walken. Almost identical to Clint Eastwood’s *A Fist Full of Dollars*, except this one is set in the gangster era. Lots of shooting with 1911 pistols.

**12. The St. Valentine’s Day Massacre (1967)**

– Jason Robards is Al Capone.

**13. Public Enemies (2009)**

– Johnny Depp as John Dillinger.

**14. The Untouchables (1996)**

– Kevin Costner, Sean Connery, Andy Garcia, Robert DeNiro. Costner plays Eliot Ness and DeNiro is Al Capone. Great gunfight scenes.

**15. The Road To Perdition (2002)** –

Tom Hanks as a gangster? Who would’ve thought?

**16. White Heat (1949)** – James Cagney, Edmond O’Brien, Virginia Mayo. Cagney is gangster Cody Jarrett. “Look Ma. Made it. Top of the World.”

**17. Bonnie and Clyde (1967)**

– Warren Beatty, Faye Dunaway.

**18. Johnny Eager (1941)**

– Robert Taylor, Lana Turner. The D.A.’s daughter (Turner) falls in love with a gangster (Taylor).

**19. Lawless (2012)**

– Tom Hardy, Shia LaBeouf, Guy Pearce.

**20. Lucky Jordan (1942)**

– Alan Ladd is a mobster and army deserter who goes after enemy spies.

**21. Little Caesar (1931)**

– Edward G. Robinson, Douglas Fairbanks Jr.

**22. Brother Orchid (1940)**

– Edward G. Robinson, Humphrey Bogart.

**23. Key Largo (1948)**

– Edward G. Robinson, Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall. Mobster Johnny Rocco (Robinson) takes hostages at a hotel during an approaching hurricane.

**24. The Whole Town’s Talking (1935)**

– Edward G. Robinson. Comedy. Mild-mannered clerk is mistaken for Public Enemy #1.

**25. Little Giant (1933)**

– Edward G. Robinson. Comedy about mobsters after Prohibition ends.

**26. Ball of Fire (1941)**

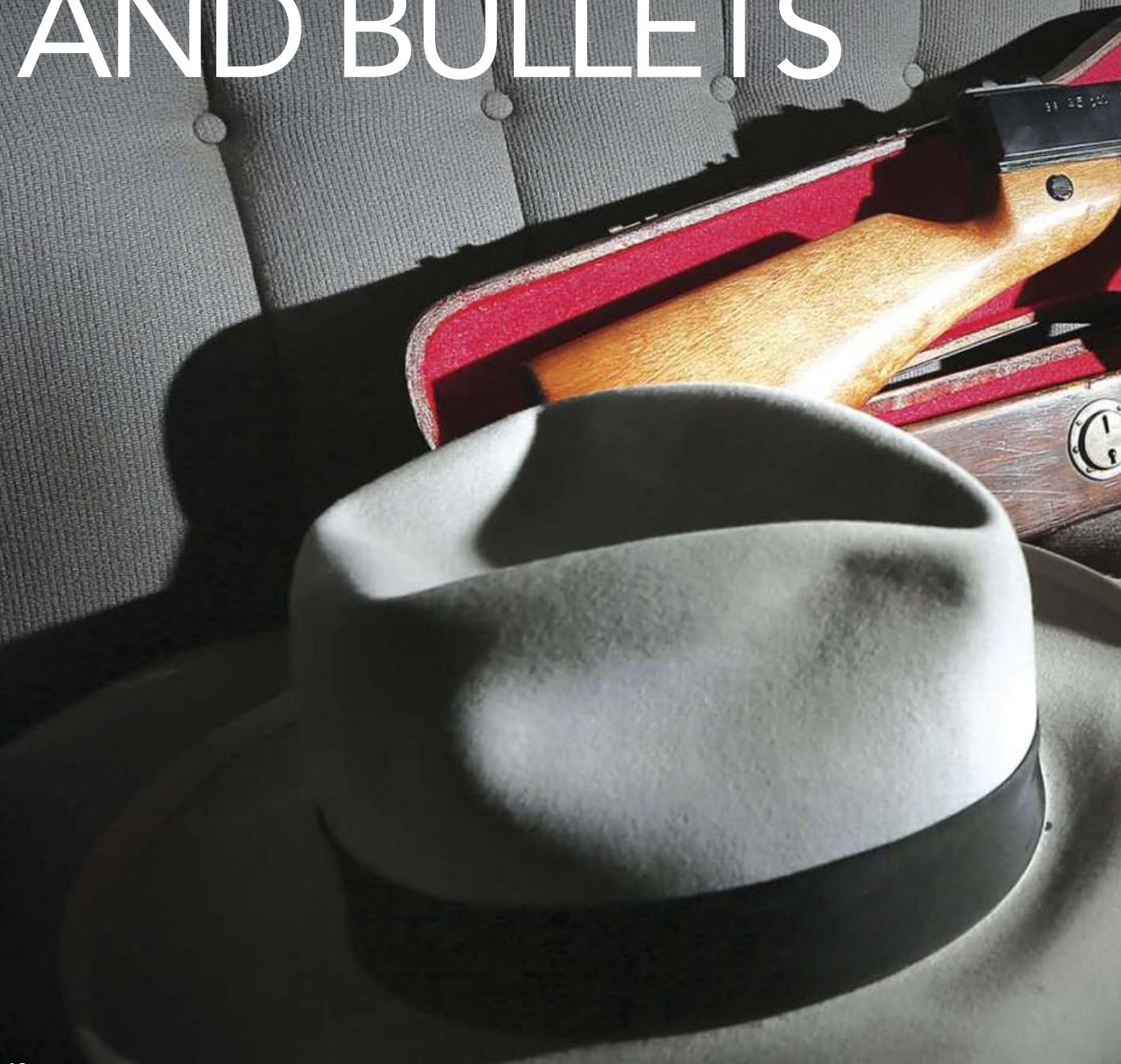
– Gary Cooper, Barbara Stanwyck, Dana Andrews. Comedy. Gangster Moll Stanwyck hides out with stuffy professors.

**“I find it easier to enter that dark world of gangsters and guns when viewing an old black & white movie.”**



COPS VS CROOKS

# BOOTLEGGERS, BANK ROBBERS AND BULLETS





**H**op in and we'll take you for a little ride. We're going back to the 1920s and early 1930s, to the days of Prohibition and the Great Depression. It was a time of bootleggers, bank robbers and bullets—lots and lots of bullets.

Along the way we'll introduce you to some of the major players of organized crime's most violent era. We'll slow down for a look at outlaws who weren't shy when it came to pulling the trigger and pay a visit to some of the top cops whose job it was to stop them.

Better buckle up.



# MAN-HU

BY MIKE SEARSON

**Because of the Gangsters' Firepower, Law Enforcement Faced a Tough Battle, but Some G-Men Rose Above Others**



**T**he "Wild West" often looked tame with regard to violence when compared to the gun battles that took place between lawmen and criminals in the 1920s.

Times were desperate during the Great Depression, and those who were on the wrong side of the law often fought to the death, taking as many lawmen as they could with them. One reason they didn't hesitate to take this course of action is that they were well-armed.

# WINTERS



A shootout scene from the 2012 movie, *Lawless*. Movie Stills Database photo



## OUTLAWS BETTER ARMED

At first glance, it looked like the forces of law and order were severely outgunned. Thompson submachine guns could be had for \$200 at most hardware stores, and lawbreakers had no qualms about breaking into National Guard Armories for BARs (Browning Automatic Rifles).

Law enforcement on the other hand, was mostly local at this point in history. Most officers did not even have radios in their cars and could not communicate with other agencies very efficiently. Worse yet was that their load-out gear still consisted of a five- or

six-shot revolver, a billy club and maybe a shotgun.

Federal Agencies such as the FBI and Prohibition Department of the Treasury were in their infancy at this time. Most of these agents were lawyers and accountants as opposed to gun fighters. FBI agents were not authorized to carry sidearms at the time.

Agents barely had arrest powers and had to perform a citizen's arrest and contact a local police officer or Federal Marshal to assist. Congress changed this in 1934 in response to the infamous Kansas City Massacre, which left four FBI agents dead and a number of es-

caped gangsters on the loose.

A few of these men made their bones and prevailed against the gangsters and bootleggers of their time, and each one did it in their own way. You're about to meet them.

## FRANK HAMER

Texas Ranger Captain Frank Hamer had a career that bridged the Old West with the modern era. Through five decades of service he was in close to 100 gunfights.

According to his biography, he was shot 17 times and left for dead four times. Hamer chased and battled Mexi-

Here are four of the six-man posse that gunned down Bonnie and Clyde. Legendary lawman Frank Hamer is seated at the right. (Getty photo)



can banditos and smugglers on horseback as well as professional assassins and the heads of organized crime outfits in automobiles. He is probably most famous for taking down the notorious Barrow Gang, headed by Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow.

Hamer killed his first man at the age of 16. He worked for a farmer named Dan McSwain who offered young Hamer \$150 to kill a third party. When Hamer refused, McSwain shot him with a shotgun and almost killed him.

Hamer recuperated and bought a Merwin Hulbert 32 double action revolver and shot McSwain a month later

#### FRANK HAMER UPDATED HIS SIDEARMS

Hamer famously carried a Colt Single Action Army revolver chambered in 45 Colt that he nicknamed "Old Lucky." The 4 3/4-inch-barreled revolver was engraved, blued and had carved pearl grips. Hamer carried it with five rounds and the hammer resting on an empty chamber without a spare reload.

When asked about this, the lawman replied, "Well if I needed more than five rounds, I wouldn't be very good at law enforcing."

Despite the bluster, Hamer knew that times were changing and outlaws were becoming more and more desperate in the Depression era. He saw this first-hand in the oil boom towns where violence and corruption were the order of the day and he was put there to set things right.

He never put "Old Lucky" out to pasture, but in later years he packed a Smith & Wesson Hand Ejector in .44 Special and a Colt Model 1911 in .38 Super.

The latter caliber may seem odd as .38 Super is mostly a competition round these days, but in Hamer's time it was the most powerful handgun cartridge available, and the truncated cone bullet was able to penetrate the thick steel automobile bodies and the primitive "bulletproof" vests that were used by criminals at that time.

Being a lawman for nearly 30 years, Hamer knew that 5 rounds of 45 Colt in his pearl-handled revolver would be inadequate for his latest task at hand: bringing the Barrow Gang to justice.



Treasury Agents like Eliot Ness favored small snub-nosed 38 Specials like the Colt Detective Special. (Photo courtesy of Mark, Fore and Strike)

through the heart, killing him with one shot. He turned himself in to the sheriff who commanded him for doing in McSwain instead of arresting him for the killing.

Six years later, Hamer enlisted in the Ranger service on April 21, 1906, and was promoted to Captain by 1921. He left for a position with the Prohibition Service, but returned to the Rangers after a seven-year absence.

Hamer commonly toted a Remington Model 8 auto-loading rifle chambered in the powerful 35 Remington in performance of his duties. With Bonnie and Clyde as his quarry, he ordered a custom-made 20-round magazine from

Peace Officers Equipment Company of St. Joseph's, Missouri, to fit the big rifle.

He and his men tracked the outlaws for 102 days through the lower Midwestern United States catching up with them on a desolate road in rural Louisiana. Fully aware of the fate that awaited lawmen who gave Barrow the chance to surrender, the posse fired more than 150 rounds at the pair of outlaws.

The officers uncovered a cache of weapons from stolen BARs to sawed-off Remington semi-automatic shotguns and numerous handguns along with thousands of rounds of ammunition.

Hamer retired from law enforce-



Actor Robert Stack portrayed Eliot Ness in the 1950's television series "The Untouchables." (Getty photo)

ment 15 years later and died three years following his retirement. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover rated Hamer as being "one of the greatest law officers in American history" and a Texas governor regarded him as "the best, most fearless and most effective peace officer Texas has ever known."

**"Times were desperate during the Great Depression and those who were on the wrong side of the law often fought to the death ..."**

#### ELIOT NESS

Chicago native, Eliot Ness joined the Bureau of Prohibition in 1927. The following year, Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon placed Ness at the head of a task force to arrest gangster Al Capone by targeting his illegal breweries and distribution routes.

A trained investigator with a master's degree in criminology, Ness scoured the records of his fellow Prohibition agents and the Chicago Police Force to assemble a team of nine men called, "the Untouchables."

Ness used an extensive wiretapping network and used the information to raid illegal stills and breweries, and seized more than 1 million dollars in illegal assets in the process.

This led to assassination attempts on Ness directed by Capone's hand, including one that resulted in the death of his best friend.

Failing to be charged with viola-

#### PURVIS PREFERRED THE 1911

As a sidearm Melvin Purvis preferred the Model 1911 pistol, but was partial to the Winchester Model 1907 chambered in 351 Winchester as a long gun when the Bureau authorized them in 1934 in response to the Kansas City Massacre.



John Dillinger was Public Enemy No. 1 until the law caught up with him in 1934. (Getty photo)



Firearms such as the Colt 1911 were found on both sides of the law, not only in 45 ACP, but in 38 Super as well. (Mike Searson photo)

#### DETECTIVE SPECIAL FOR NESS

The exploits of Eliot Ness against Al Capone have spawned numerous movies, television programs and novels. Most of the time he is portrayed wielding a Colt Government Model or Winchester Model 12 shotgun, but in reality the famous G-Man's sidearm was a 2-inch Colt Detective Special worn in a shoulder holster.

tions of the Volstead Act, Capone was pursued by the IRS for tax evasion. On Oct. 17, 1931, he was convicted on five of the tax evasion charges after the 5,000 Volstead Act violations were dismissed. Ness, meanwhile, was promoted to Chief Investigator of the Prohibition Bureau for Chicago and Ohio.

Following the repeal of prohibition, Ness worked in law enforcement, dabbed in politics and eventually faded into obscurity, dying of a massive heart attack at the age of 54, one month before his memoirs were published.

#### MELVIN PURVIS

From the extremes of the Old West gunfighter that was Frank Hamer and a modern detective who relied more on technology like Eliot Ness, we come to a happy medium in FBI agent Melvin Purvis.

This southern-born lawyer joined the FBI in 1927 and rose to the directorship of the Chicago Division by the 1930s.

Purvis was the FBI's public face for bringing down some of the public enemies of the era such as John Dillinger, Pretty Boy Floyd and Baby Face Nelson. He became one of the most popular G-men of the era, leading his boss to demote him and downplay his successes lest his star appeared to shine brighter than that of Director J. Edgar Hoover.

Hoover's answer while downplaying Purvis' role was: "No one employee of this Division can be responsible for the successful termination of any one case... Through cooperative efforts a case is broken."

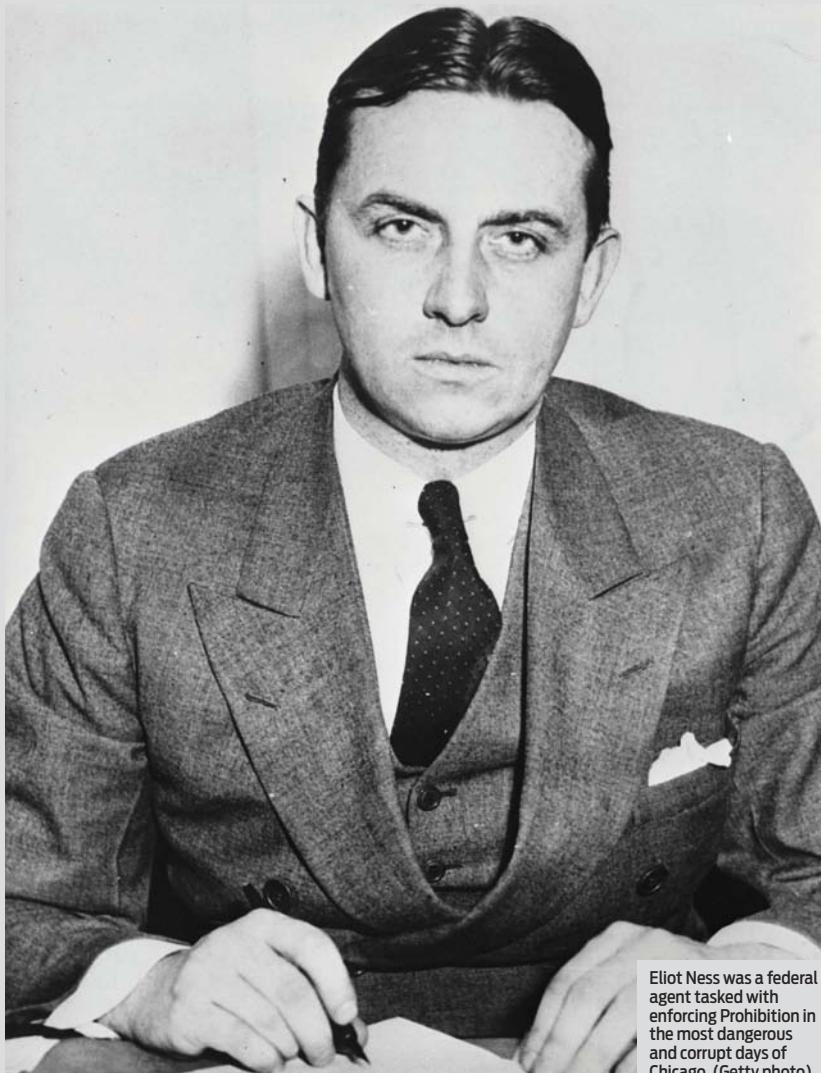
After feeling that he was being slighted, Purvis resigned from the Bureau in 1935 and returned to practicing law. He joined the Army as an intelligence officer after the outbreak of World War II and put together much of the evidence against Nazi officers at Nuremberg when the war ended.

Purvis passed away in 1960 at his South Carolina home. He was killed by a single bullet fired from a Colt 1911



Clyde Barrow shown with two of the many guns he used during his crime spree. (Getty photo)

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
**FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover**  
rated Hamer as being  
***“One of the greatest law officers in American History”***



Eliot Ness was a federal agent tasked with enforcing Prohibition in the most dangerous and corrupt days of Chicago. (Getty photo)



Here are some of the weapons used by the notorious John Dillinger over his career. (Getty photo)

## KEY NUMBERS

Frank Hamer

**17** The number of times he was shot

**4** The number of times he was left for dead

**16** Hamer's age when he first killed a man

**150** In dollars, the amount of money he was offered to kill a third party

pistol that was a gift from his brother agents upon his resignation from the FBI. Originally labeled a suicide, it was later found out that it was a negligent discharge when the former agent was trying to remove a live round that was stuck in the chamber.

### LEGACY

The end result of the crime wave that began with bootleggers in the 1920s and culminated in the sensationalized bank robberies of the 1930s was an increase in firepower and technology for law enforcement at all levels.

Even the stoic Hoover, who prided himself on the intelligence and professionalism of his fledgling agency, was quick to realize that he needed men who were capable gunfighters instead of lawyers and clerks.

Unfortunately, the devastation wrought by the criminals at the time led to the Federal Government enacting its first attempt at gun control through the National Firearms Act, which placed severe restrictions on civilian possession of machine guns, silencers and short-barreled long guns.

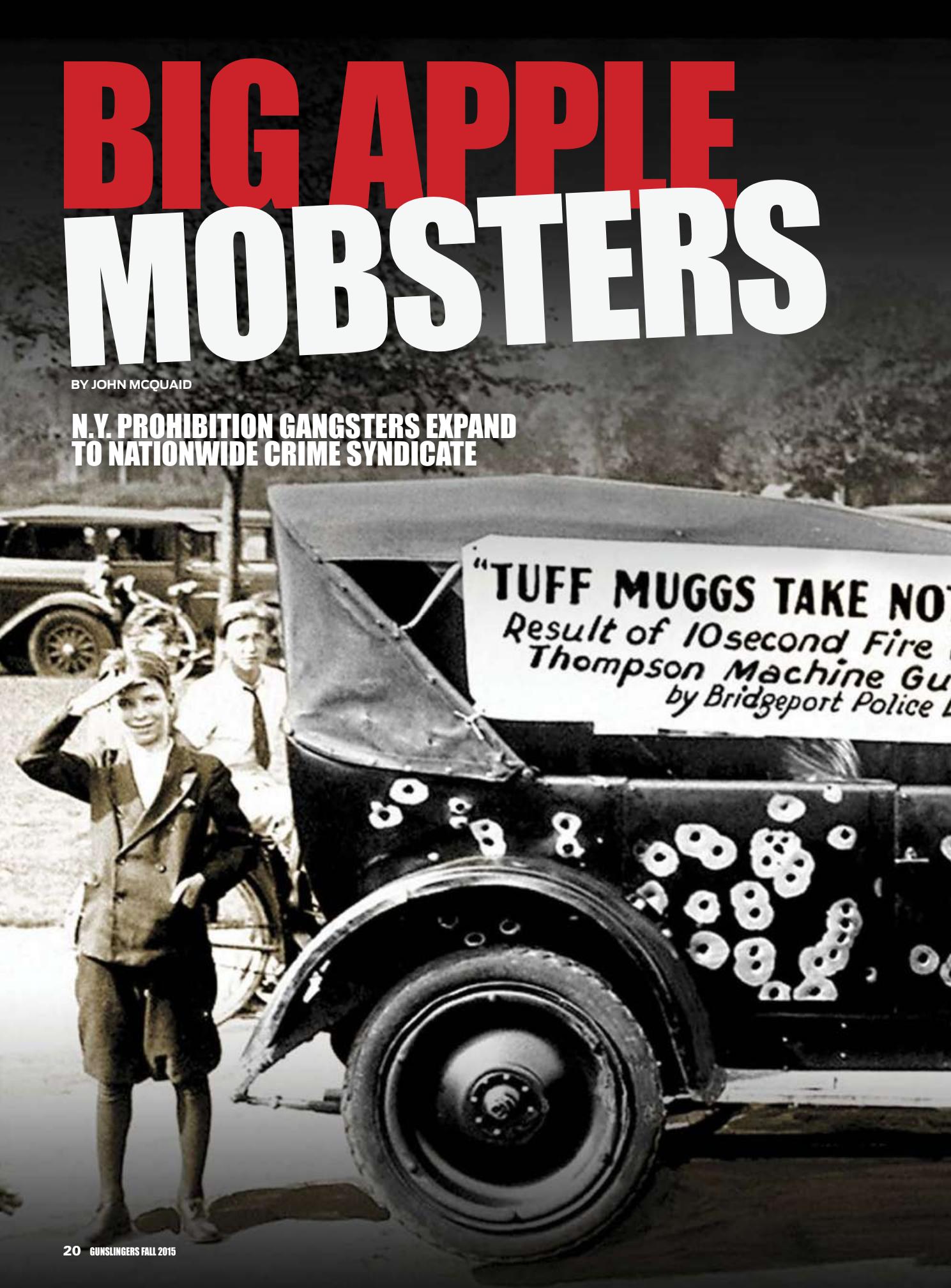
It is actually quite remarkable to think that the majority of the work performed by police officers and federal agents prior to 1934 was done with revolvers and shotguns (if they were allowed to be armed at all) in the face of Thompsons and BARs.

*Mike Searson is a Marine veteran who has worked in the firearms industry his entire adult life as a gunsmith, ballistician, consultant, author and instructor. GNSL*

# BIG APPLE MOBSTERS

BY JOHN MCQUAID

N.Y. PROHIBITION GANGSTERS EXPAND  
TO NATIONWIDE CRIME SYNDICATE



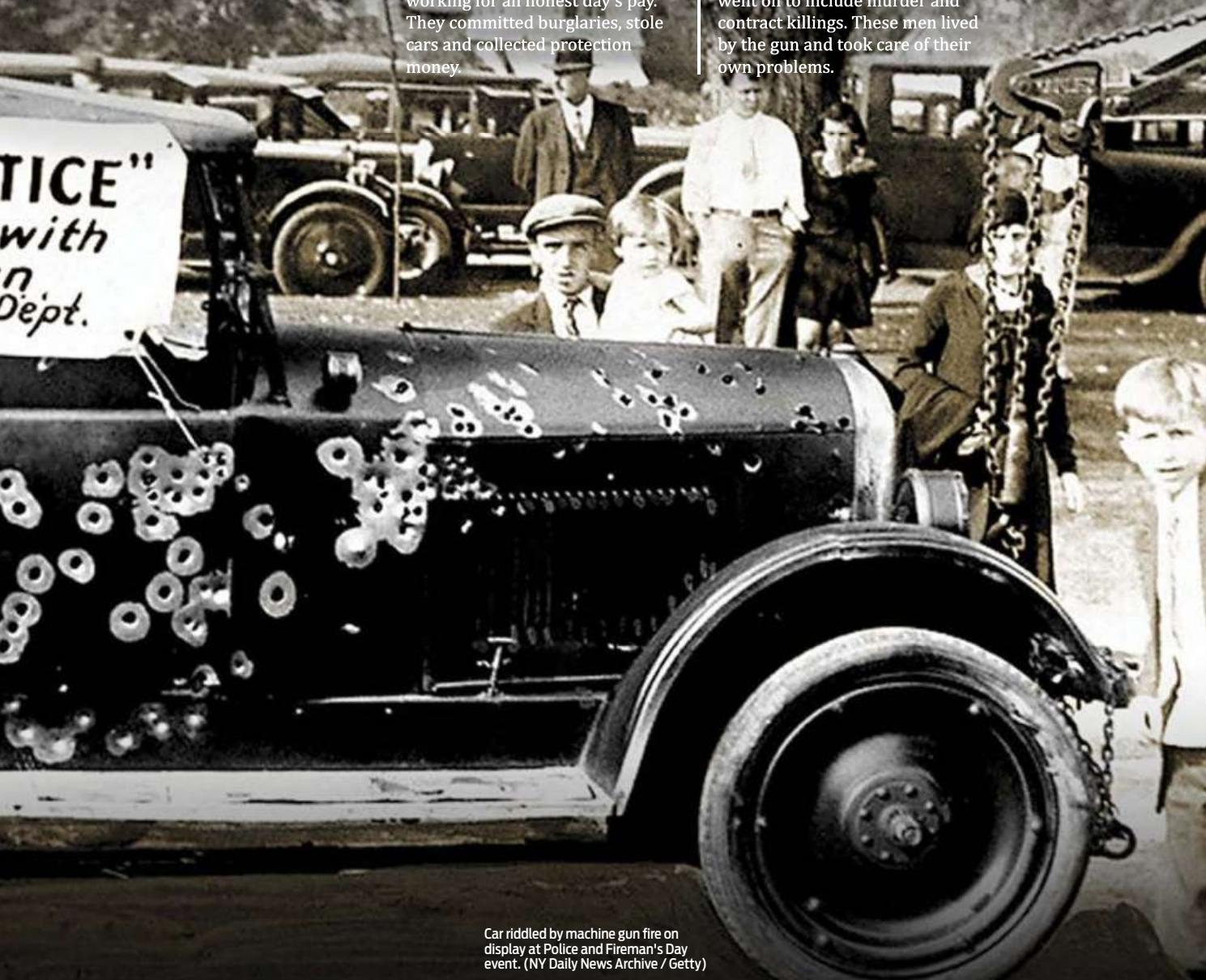
"TUFF MUGGS TAKE NOTE!  
Result of 10 second Fire  
Thompson Machine Gun  
by Bridgeport Police Dept



**T**hey were the breeding grounds. The Streets of New York City have often been associated with some of the most infamous gangsters in American History. Names like Lucky Luciano, Bugsy Siegel and Dutch Schultz come to mind.

These three men came from poor families and decided that getting an education and making an honest living wasn't for them. They all dropped out of school at early ages and decided that being a thug was more profitable than working for an honest day's pay. They committed burglaries, stole cars and collected protection money.

The Prohibition era was a golden opportunity for these thugs to make a fortune. They provided illegal liquor and beer to thirsty American customers who became silent partners in their criminal enterprise. Their criminal careers went on to include murder and contract killings. These men lived by the gun and took care of their own problems.



Car riddled by machine gun fire on display at Police and Fireman's Day event. (NY Daily News Archive / Getty)



A mugshot of notorious mobster "Lucky" Luciano. (Getty photo)

## The Mafia Starts Here

### LUCKY LUCIANO

The name "Lucky" may have come from his survival of a savage attack.

In 1929 Luciano was kidnapped, beaten, stabbed and left for dead in Staten Island, New York. It's not clear who ordered the attack on Luciano, but speculation suggests it could have been his former crime boss Giuseppe "Joe the Boss" Masseria.

Masseria was head of the largest crime family in New York City by 1929.

Luciano had worked for Masseria for years, but ended up supporting his rival Salvatore Maranzano.

Luciano helped plan a nasty death for Masseria. Luciano and Masseria went to the Nuova Villa Tammaro Restaurant in Coney Island on April 15, 1931. Luciano went to the bathroom

and four gunmen entered the restaurant and shot "Joe the Boss" to death. Two of the suspected gunmen were Luciano's friend Bugsy Siegel and Vito Genovese. No arrests were made in the murder.

A half a year later, Salvatore Maranzano was killed by Luciano's soldiers, making Luciano the "Capo dei Capi" or boss of all bosses.

#### The Path To Crime

Charles "Lucky" Luciano was born in Sicily on Nov. 24, 1897, as Salvatore Lucania. He moved to the United States with his family in 1906.

He became friends with Meyer Lansky and Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel. Lucky got busted for dealing heroin and did a six-month stint in a reformatory. Salvatore Lucania is believed to have changed his name to Charles Luciano as his family had pretty much disowned him for his criminal activities.

**"The name 'Lucky' may have come from his survival of a savage attack. In 1929 Luciano was kidnapped, beaten, stabbed and left for dead ..."**

Lucky Luciano saw Prohibition as an opportunity to make some fast cash and began to associate with such mobsters as Vito Genovese and Frank Costello.

He was also instrumental in taking out two rival Mafia bosses and changed organized crime at its core. He set up five major families that ruled New York and began a national crime syndicate.

### LUCKY LUCIANO'S BIO

-- Prohibition gangster who rose to prominence in New York by having gang bosses murdered.  
-- Helped to form "The Commission," which laid the groundwork for a national syndicate of crime families.  
-- In prison for 10 years, during which time he used his mob connections to assist the U.S. during World War II.  
-- In 1946, he was paroled and deported to Italy.

### His Influence on the Mafia

The modern-day Mafia took shape under the leadership of Lucky Luciano. He pushed for a balanced distribution of power between the top five crime families in New York City. They were known as the Genovese, Profaci, Bonanno, Gambino and Luciano families. Lucky helped to form a national syndicate with a board of directors consisting of Italian and Jewish mobsters.

Their business ventures consisted of gambling, prostitution, narcotics, loan sharking, bootlegging and union labor rackets. He was able to pull in other crime bosses from across the U.S., including Al Capone from Chicago. This mobster organization was known as "The Commission."

Luciano wasn't so lucky in 1936 when he got sentenced 30 to 50 years for facilitating prostitution and extortion. A special prosecutor by the name of Thomas Dewey won his conviction. Luciano was sent to Clinton County Correctional Facility in Dannemora, New York.

Luciano ended up running the prison and most of his criminal empire inside its walls. During World War II, he was able to get his mob-controlled dock-workers to watch out for enemy saboteurs and also used his criminal connections in Italy to influence the Allied Cause.

That assistance prompted New York Governor Thomas Dewey to parole Luciano in 1946. Luciano was deported to Sicily where he stayed for a short time. He travelled to Havana, where he met up with his old buddies Bugsy Siegel and Meyer Lansky. Luciano attempted to set up operations in Havana but was deported back to Italy in 1947 due to pressure from the U.S. government. Lucky Luciano died of a heart attack on Jan. 26, 1962, in Naples.



**BROOKLYN EDITION** **DAILY NEWS** **PICTURE NEWSPAPER** **EXTRA**  
Vol. 21 No. 284 62 Pages  
New York Wednesday, July 29, 1931  
2 Cents 10¢ Extra | Pictures

## Beer Gunners KILL CHILD, WOUND 4

Story on Page 2



**Shortly before this picture was made, gangsters opened fire at a carriage pulled by two horses, and wounded down five children. During the shooting, crowds ran to cover, and afterward they returned to the street, as shown above.**

**GANGSTERS SHOT FIVE CHILDREN—Rumored to be police gun squad played a role in the shooting between Second and Third Aves., yesterday morning to raise hell. Early today one boy died. ... Story on Page 2**

**PETERS TALKS** —Former Mayor Peters of Boston, shown with his son, Stanley P. Pihl, and his wife, Florence DiMino, as she sat to pick up the child in the carriage.

**PETERS HINTS AT BLACKMAIL PLOT** **PAGE THREE**

Many times innocent bystanders were killed when they were caught in the crossfire between feuding gangsters. (Getty photo)



Bugsy Siegel (center) was gunned down, it is suspected, because he was skimming money from the Las Vegas casino mob profits. (Getty photo)

## The Wrong Path Early

### **BUGSY SIEGEL**

Poverty didn't appeal to Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel.

He was born in Brooklyn, New York, on Feb. 28, 1906, and his parents were Jewish immigrants who didn't have much money. Bugsy turned to an

early life of crime, vowing he'd rise above the poverty.

Bugsy made friends with Meyer Lansky, who later formed a family of Jewish mobsters known as the Bugs Meyer Gang. Part of their criminal exploits included stealing cars and running a gambling operation. The Prohibition years were kind to Bugsy. He made good money as a bootlegger running up and down the East coast.

They went on to form the infamous Murder, Inc., which was a ruthless band of contract killers responsible for an estimated 1,000 deaths across the country. Bugsy was purported to be instrumental in removing rival mobsters, such as the Fabrizio brothers. He was suspected of being one of the trigger men in the murder of Masseria and Maranzano, and his trail of bodies included rival loan sharks Joseph and Louis Amberg.



New York mobster Meyer Lansky was considered the brains behind much early mob activity. (Getty photo)

#### BUGSY SIEGEL'S BIO

-- NY gangster and friend of Lucky Luciano and Meyer Lansky.  
-- Performed mob hits for Lansky and became part of Murder, Inc., a group of mob assassins.  
-- Moved to West coast where he ran drug and labor rackets for the mob.  
-- Developed mob control of casinos in Las Vegas.  
-- Shot to death in 1947, supposedly for skimming mob profits from casinos.



Actress Alice Granville shows off bullet holes in 1931 after being shot by her husband, Pete Donahue, a Dutch Schultz hitman. Granville said he shot her at a nightclub party "to prove his affection." (Getty photo)

**"Siegel's downfall happened because he was supposedly skimming from the Flamingo Hotel's profits. He was gunned down on June 20, 1947."**

In the late 1930s, the Syndicate sent Bugsy Siegel to California where he flourished in running gambling rackets and establishing a drug trade from along the West coast to Mexico.

Bugsy even worked with the national syndicate running labor rackets with the Teamsters and Screen Extras Guild to extort money from movie studios in Hollywood.

In 1941 Ben Siegel was tried for the murder of Harry "Big Greenie" Greenberg who had threatened to become a police informant. The case fell apart after two state witnesses died Siegel was acquitted.

Siegel reinvented himself in 1945 when he became involved in the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas. Las Vegas was a sleepy little town before Siegel arrived. He invested \$6,000,000 to build up the Flamingo Hotel. Some of this cash was Syndicate money.

#### The Downfall

It is theorized Benjamin Siegel's downfall happened because he became too greedy. He was supposedly skimming from the Flamingo Hotel's profits. He was gunned down in the Beverly Hills home of his mistress, Virginia Hill, on June 20, 1947.

Coincidentally, Luciano's men walked into the Flamingo Hotel and let everyone know they were now running the place about the same time Bugsy was murdered.

If Luciano was the guy who reinvented the modern day mob, then Ben "Bugsy" Siegel can be credited as being the father of the multi-million dollar modern day tourist attraction of Las Vegas.



Dutch Schultz had been in trouble with the law numerous times, but he met his end by bullets from gangster guns. (Getty photo)

## Violent and Brutal

## DUTCH SCHULTZ

Dutch Schultz was known for his violent temper and brutal methods. He hung one of his victims by his thumbs from meat hooks and was brutally beaten for being an uncooperative bootlegger. He then placed a blindfold over his victim's eyes that had been contaminated with gonorrhea discharge causing the man to go blind.

Crossing Dutch could get you a pair of cement shoes. His former lieutenant, Bo Weinberg, found this out when he was thrown into the Hudson River wearing a pair of them. It is said that Schultz personally encased his legs in the cement.

### How It All Started

Arthur Flegenheimer, a.k.a. Dutch Schultz, was born on Aug. 6, 1902, in the Bronx, New York. His parents, of Jewish descent, emigrated to the U.S. from Germany.

He joined a local gang and took on the nickname of "Dutch Schultz" or the "Dutchman." The nickname came from a notorious gangster from the late 1800s.

Dutch became a bootlegger during Prohibition and ran illegal shipments of liquor from Canada to the United States. Prohibition was kind to Dutch. He made a ton of cash and became known as the "Beer Baron of the Bronx."

He became one of the biggest gangsters in New York City and had about 100 gunmen in his employ.

Dutch later expanded his operations into Manhattan, New York, which

### DUTCH SCHULTZ

-- Rose to prominence as Prohibition era smuggler of liquor and became known as the "Beer Baron of the Bronx."

-- Ruthless killer who ordered murders of rival gangsters, including Vincent Coll.

-- Indicted several times, he threatened to kill special prosecutor Thomas Dewey, New York's future governor.

-- Gunned down with his bodyguards in a New Jersey restaurant in 1935. It was suspected that Luciano and other mobsters ordered the hit to prevent Schultz from killing Dewey.

**“... Dutch Schultz ... was known for his violent temper ... One of his victims was hung by his thumbs from meat hooks and brutally beaten ...”**

caused friction between him and Legs Diamond. In October of 1928, members of Diamond's gang murdered Dutch's partner Joey Noe.

Diamond met his end at his Albany home on Dec. 18, 1931. Speculation exists that members of the Albany Police did the hit on the order of political leader Dan O'Connell or rival mobsters.

Schultz clashed with other rival mobsters, including Vincent Coll. The two mobsters engaged in a bloody war that left many men dead on both sides.

Schultz sent three hit men after Coll, who was riddled with submachine gun bullets while he was in a phone booth at the London Chemists drug store on Feb. 8, 1932.

Schultz was indicted on tax charges in 1933. The heat from the authorities interfered with his illegal activities, causing him to go into hiding. Dutch ended up beating the rap in 1934 and celebrated by killing his fellow criminal



Police investigate at the New Jersey restaurant where Dutch Schultz was gunned down.  
(NY Daily News Archive / Getty)

Bo Weinberg for allowing Lucky Luciano to take over his racketeering schemes. In 1935, Schultz was indicted on tax charges. He was planning to have to have then special prosecutor Thomas Dewey killed for interfering with his illegal enterprises.

Schultz went to the Syndicate and asked them to put out a hit on Dewey. This request likely caused tension among fellow mobsters who didn't want the heat that comes from killing a public figure like Thomas Dewey, who headed the task force on organized crime. They were alleged to have put out a hit on Dutch because of his plans for Dewey.

#### The End

Dutch Schultz became a bullet sponge on Oct. 23, 1935, in a Newark, New Jersey restaurant. The hit squad entered the restaurant and killed his bodyguards. They then entered the bathroom and shot Dutch several times. Dutch was critically wounded, clinging to life for two days in a hospital ranting to the police officers assigned to watch over him.



Guns recovered after the murder of Dutch Schultz.  
(Getty photo)

#### THEIR LEGACY

The mobsters of that era were smart enough to realize that their syndicate would have been wiped out if they decided to start killing police officers and prosecutors. Rules were set up by the Commission that were enforced with brutal efficiency. Lucky Luciano, Ben Siegel and Dutch Schultz were three of the most prolific mobsters of the 20s, 30s and 40s.

The three contributed greatly to the growth of the evil enterprise in this country that is organized crime. They were much more intelligent and cunning than most of the present day thugs and outlaws, but in the end they learned that the old adage is true. If you live by the sword, you often perish by the sword.

*John M. McQuaid is a police officer and a firearms instructor in Up-state, New York, and is a life-long history buff.*



With the Great War over, John Thompson no longer had a buyer for his brainchild—the “Tommy” gun. But local police departments, he reasoned, might be coaxed into buying. Here, Chicago PD Lieutenant William Shoemacher aims a Tommy gun in 1926.



# WINDY CITY WAR

BY ELAINE K. PHILLIPS

## HOW CHICAGO GAVE ITSELF A BLOODY VALENTINE

**T**he dog kept howling. Jeanette Landesman dropped her morning ironing. In the ice-slick street below her window, two policemen were shoving three hooded men into a black police Cadillac—not an unusual sight in Chicago, 1929. Nor was the rat-tat-tat-tat of Thompson submachine gun fire, which Landesman had heard a second before, an unusual sound.

But together, the police and the gunfire raised Landesman's suspicions: Chicago Police Department (CPD) officers weren't authorized to carry the "Tommy gun," which had been designed as a "trench broom" for World War I.

As the car drove off, Landesman asked fellow boarder D.L. McAllister to check on the garage across the way. McAllister obliged. Inside the frigid garage, he was greeted by a cloud of smoke and a sight from France's killing fields: six men lay dead, pierced by at least 15 bullets apiece.

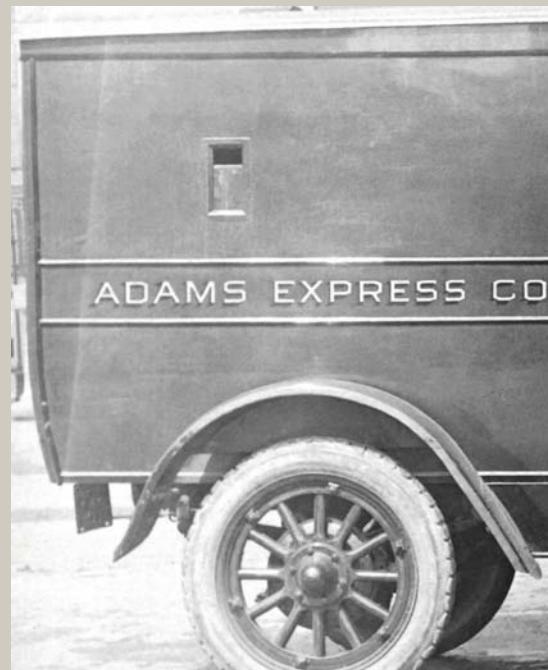
One man had been nearly cut in half by the barrage; another's brain had exploded; another lay on his back with his fedora still perched on his head. Chained to a truck, an Alsatian shepherd barked and whined as the seventh victim, barely alive, summoned the strength to blame cops for the carnage. He too would be dead by 1:30 p.m., but the investigation into the St. Valentine's Day Massacre had only just begun.



The Chicago PD used Calvin Goddard's forensic analysis to reenact the St. Valentine's Day massacre at Moran's garage on 2122 North Clark Street.



Spike O'Donnell was chatting with a young boy when Frank McErlane cornered him here in 1925. As McErlane showered the brick wall with bullets, O'Donnell threw himself and the boy behind the car. O'Donnell survived the shooting more or less intact.



## SPEAKEASIES & EASY MONEY

By criminalizing the production, sale and consumption of alcohol, the 18th Amendment and Volstead Act (1919) upset the power balance between Chicago's gangs by creating a new market no one already controlled.

Bootlegging quickly proved a goldmine. Somehow, the "Terrible Gennas" (six Sicilian brothers involved in organized crime) acquired a government license to make industrial alcohol and

soon made \$350,000 per month from bootlegging, according to author Nate Hendley.

Al Capone and his mentor, Johnny Torrio, followed suit: In 1920, they abandoned the prostitution business and treated with the black policy gangs, paying them handsomely to stay out of bootlegging. By year's end, Torrio had grossed \$4,000,000 from bootlegging alone. The Italians, it seemed, had cornered Chicago's hottest commodity.

The Irish, however, wouldn't stay out—not the West Side and South Side O'Donnell Gangs, nor Joe Saltis' Irish-Polish coalition, nor O'Banion's North Side Gang of boyhood buds.

But inter-gang violence was counterproductive, Torrio argued. With such high demand for illegal alcohol, there was plenty of opportunity for each gang to make a fortune from bootlegging—as long as each gang sold only within its own territory.



Chicago policemen, such as this one photographed outside a van in 1928, had to be ever vigilant. According to one estimate, there were at least 360 gang killings in 1927 alone and 37 of the victims were cops.

So Torrio and Mike Merlo negotiated a truce between Torrio, O'Banion and the Gennas. From 1920 to 1923 the peace held, and the gangs cooperated well enough that they co-owned the Sieben Brewery.

### THE BEER WARS

In 1923, the uneasy truce unraveled. After Republican Mayor William Thompson withdrew his bid for reelection, the new mayor, Democrat William

Emmet Dever, lost no time launching a war on Chicago's crooks.

Within months, Dever had ripped enough holes in the gangs' operations that their leaders began to panic. To recoup their losses, the Genna brothers poured their dirt-cheap "whiskey" into North Side territory. O'Banion retaliated by stealing \$30,000 worth of Genna liquor.

Then, for no apparent reason, O'Banion set up Torrio to be arrested at the Sieben Brewery. With Torrio en-

### FURTHER READING

**Richard J. Shmelter's** *Guns and Roses: The Untold Story of Dean O'Banion, Chicago's Big Shot Before Al Capone* (Cumberland House Publishing, 2008).

**Rose Keefe's** *The Man Who Got Away: The Bugs Moran Story* (Cumberland House Publishing, 2005).

**Nate Hendley's** *American Gangsters, Then and Now: An Encyclopedia* (ABC-CLIO, 2010).

**James Doherty's** "John Stege, Fighting Cop" in the *Chicago Tribune*, May 25, 1952. See [archives.chicagotribune.com](http://archives.chicagotribune.com).

**M. Dwayne Smith and Margaret A. Zahn's** *Homicide: A Sourcebook of Social Research* (Sage, 2009).

raged and Merlo succumbed to cancer, there was no one to protect O'Banion from the Genna brothers or from Torrio, for that matter.

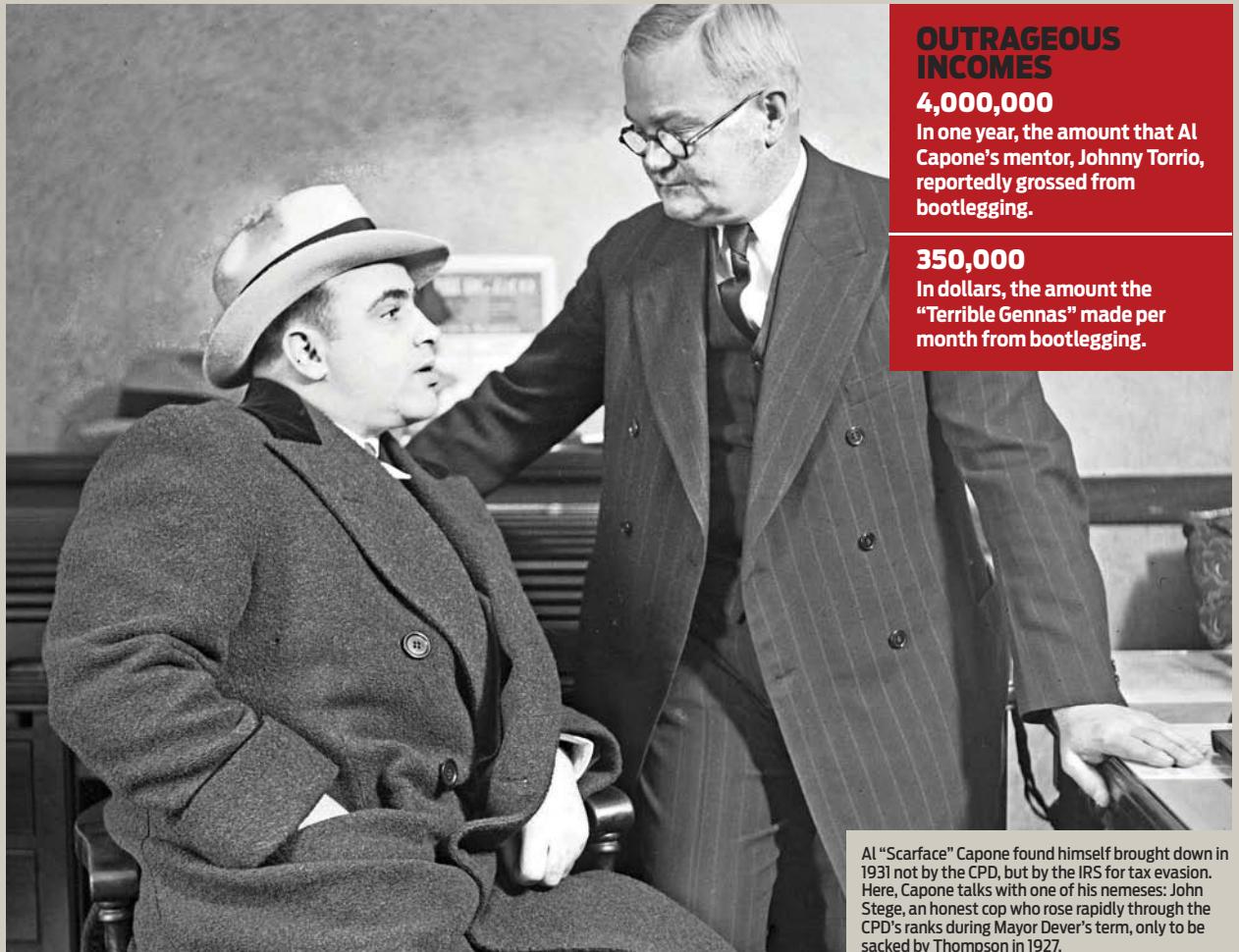
Three of Torrio's men shot O'Banion at point-blank range in his flower shop on Nov. 10, 1924. O'Banion's grieving friends Hymie Weiss, Vincent Drucci and George "Bugs" Moran knew it—and swore to avenge him.

### THE BOOTLEG BATTLE OF THE MARNE

In January 1925, after two months of meticulous planning, Weiss sent a sedan packed with North Siders to blast Capone's car with their shotguns. Capone would've died that day, had he been in his car. Distressed, Capone invested in a bulletproof car and upped his security.

Torrio, on his way to jail, assumed Weiss wouldn't take the time to target him. But the methodical Weiss moved faster than anyone expected. On January 25, Weiss, Drucci and Moran ambushed Torrio in front of his own apartment. As Torrio's wife Anna watched, paralyzed with fear, Weiss and Moran riddled Torrio with bullets. Torrio would indeed go to jail, but only after an excruciating hospital stay. With Torrio out for the count, Capone launched his own revenge campaign.

Thus Chicago plunged into all-out war. The Chicago Sun-Times called it "The Bootleg Battle of the Marne." The first Battle of the Marne in September 1914 had inaugurated four hellish years of trench warfare. Astute journalists realized that the Weiss-Capone conflict would cause years of bloodshed.



## OUTRAGEOUS INCOMES

**4,000,000**

In one year, the amount that Al Capone's mentor, Johnny Torrio, reportedly grossed from bootlegging.

**350,000**

In dollars, the amount the "Terrible Gennas" made per month from bootlegging.

## THE TOMMY GUN COMES TO TOWN

The violence escalated as 1925 rushed on. The Tommy gun got its Chicago debut when Fred McErlane attempted to murder Spike O'Donnell. At the time, just 3,000 Thompson submachine guns had been sold nationwide; hence journalists reporting on the incident didn't know what to make of the battered brick wall behind where O'Donnell stood.

Soon, bootleggers were buying Tommys left and right. Capable of firing at a rate of about 850 rounds per minute, the "trench broom" lent a new moniker to "Machine Gun" Jack McGurn and other notorious killers.

As the bodies piled high, the O'Donnell gangs crumbled, the three remaining Genna brothers fled Chicago, and Saltis brokered a desperate treaty with Weiss. Chicago, it seemed, would go to the last man alive. That man wouldn't be Weiss. Despite his careful machinations, Capone's killers struck Weiss down in 1926.

The battle climaxed in 1927 to 28,



**“There is probably no city in America with more of political trickery, chicanery and exploitation than Chicago.”**

—Walter F. White (1919)

when Thompson challenged Mayor Dever's reelection bid. Capone threw all his clout behind the corrupt Thompson, killing Dever's supporters.

Considering a mayor in Capone's pocket a worse prospect than a mayor no money could buy, Drucci, now the North Side Gang's leader, launched a similar campaign against Thompson. But even with his career at stake, Dever couldn't be bought. He ordered the police to arrest Drucci, who died in police custody.

By the time Thompson took his oath as mayor, the Bootleg Battle of the Marne was over. With Torrio retired and Thompson in office, Al Capone emerged as the uncontested ruler of Chicago and to challenge him was to court death. Which is exactly what Moran did.



Rival gangsters Al Capone (left) and George "Bugs" Moran.

#### CHICAGO'S CROOKED POLITICIANS

It takes two kinds of baddies to make a bad town: crooks and crooked leaders. Here are a few of the Windy City's worst 1920s politicians:

**William Hale "Big Bill" Thompson (1869-1944):** Republican mayor of Chicago from 1915 to 1923 and 1927 to 1931. Called "Big Bill" by his fans and "Kaiser Bill" by his critics, Thompson blew through \$4.5 million of city funds in 1919 alone. By his death, Thompson had stashed \$1.75 million in gold certificates and bank notes—mostly from bootleggers' payoffs.

**Mike Merlo (1880-1924):** As head of the Unione Siciliana, he redirected its energies from helping Sicilian immigrants into supporting organized crime. Still, he was one of Jazz Age Chicago's more level heads: As Johnny Torrio's ally, he successfully mediated between Chicago's rival gangs on multiple occasions.

**Joseph Esposito (1872-1928):** A Black Hand extortionist-turned Republican politician, Esposito was the 19th Ward's boss from the early 1920s. An ally of the Genna Brothers, "Diamond Joe" liked to boast about being posted by Calvin Coolidge on the Electoral Committee. Esposito was shot to death in his own front yard in 1928 with his wife and children watching from inside the house.

**William H. McSwiggin (1900-1926):** Despite his nickname "The Hanging Prosecutor" and hardliner reputation, Chicago's Assistant State Attorney was as crooked as they come. Reputed to be friends with Capone, he was shot in Cicero during a drunken night on the town with the O'Donnell brothers.



Chicago police force their way into Al Capone's safe in 1931 after the gangster's



Nicknamed "the Youngest City" after World War I, Chicago's veterans returned home in 1919 to a city they could hardly recognize thanks to immigration and Mayor Thompson's cavalier approach to law and order.

## THE BLOODY VALENTINE

Avenging his boyhood friends would prove difficult, however. Capone had new digs—two floors in Chicago's Lexington Hotel and a Spanish-style mansion in Miami—which he outfitted with bullet-proof concrete walls and secret passageways.

So Moran turned his sights instead on McGurn, Capone's top hitman. In March and April 1927, North Siders Pete and Frank Gusenberg twice loaded a submachine gun and .45 to kill McGurn.

Though wounded, McGurn survived—unlike the 294 other Chicagoans who died in 1927 alone as Moran and Capone eliminated each other's allies, according to authors Smith and Zahn.

In January 1929, a nearly successful Capone-ordered hit drove a wounded Moran into hiding. After two weeks of

plotting, Moran summoned his seven most trusted men to an obscure brick garage on North Clark Street on Thursday, Feb. 14, at 10:30 a.m., for a council of war. Only the trusted few would know of the meeting—or so Moran thought.

When word reached Capone at his Miami mansion, the opportunity to destroy the North Side Gang must have seemed too good to miss. Exactly what happened remains hotly debated by historians.

Many believe that Capone authorized McGurn to eliminate Moran however he wished. If so, McGurn's plan was genius. On the morning of Feb. 14, he would post a lookout across the street from the garage. The lookout would phone a certain number when Moran arrived.

Then, two men in CPD uniforms

would saunter in and frisk the North Siders. As the "cops" stood the annoyed gangsters face-first against the brick wall and relieved them of their .38 and .45 handguns, three hitmen with two Tommys and a shotgun would creep into the garage.

The North Siders wouldn't know the hitmen were there until the bullets ripped open their backs and the dog began to howl. With the North Siders dead, the "cops" would "arrest" the hitmen and hurry them across the snowy street to the waiting black Cadillac.

On Feb. 14, McGurn's men executed the plan perfectly, except for that initial phone call. The lookout had mistaken Albert Weinshank for Moran. Thus the fake cops arrived too soon and Moran not at all.

## THE FALLOUT

When word of the massacre spread, "wet" and "dry" Chicagoans alike demanded an end to the violence—and to Jack McGurn, the prime suspect.

Scrambling to disprove accusations that the CPD was involved, Police Commissioner William Russell launched a massive manhunt for McGurn. Then Russell requested that an outside expert, Calvin Goddard of New York's ballistics bureau, analyze the evidence recovered from the crime scene. Goddard tested every police gun against the ammunition found at the garage and, failing to find a match, declared the CPD not guilty.

Meanwhile, the press amplified Chicago's outrage to a national audience. Until now, bootlegging had been seen as a victimless crime. But as the CPD mopped up the blood, America began to see its bootlegging gangsters for what they really were.

Johnny Torrio returned and tried to be the voice of reason as he presided over America's first official organized crime summit in Atlantic City on May 13 to 16, 1929. No one wanted to be hunted down like McGurn or go into hiding in Canada like Moran and so bootlegging magnates from New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Chicago pledged to keep the peace.

But peace was broken before it began. On May 8, police had found three of Capone's men dead in Indiana. The coroner couldn't quite conclude which little gift had killed them: the barbarous beatings to their bodies or the bullets in their brains. Moran was the initial suspect, but another theory was that Capone himself had the men killed for plotting against him.

Prohibition ended in 1933 and with it a substantial part of the mobsters' business. Al Capone was jailed from 1931 to 1939 for tax evasion. He spent his last years suffering from advanced stages of syphilis and gonorrhea. He died of cardiac arrest in 1947.

George "Bugs" Moran never regained prominence as a major organized crime leader. He was in and out of prison the rest of his life and died of lung cancer in 1957 while serving a sentence for robbery in Leavenworth Prison.

*Elaine K. Phillips studied World War I at Oxford University and earned her Master's degree from Oxford Brookes University. She researches and writes historical articles. GNSL*

## WHY THE WINDY CITY

**The St. Valentine's Day Massacre stemmed from Chicago's deep-rooted troubles with corruption and violence. Chicago boomed during the Industrial Revolution, becoming the fulcrum on the railways Civil War veterans and their Colt revolvers took west.**

**As factory bosses grew richer and the workers grew poorer, corrupt politicians accepted bribes from criminals and operated their own prostitution and gambling rings. Nevertheless, immigrants from Poland, Ireland, and Italy poured into Chicago, growing the city 5.6 times its 1870 population to 1.69 million.**

**Chicago's many guns saw action in May 1894, when tensions between Pullman railway workers and their bosses erupted; for months, ordinary Chicagoans lived under martial law as federal troops occupied their city. In 1914, the federal government curtailed immigration from Europe, which caused Chicago's wartime industrial growth to create a labor shortage.**

**To find work and escape the Ku Klux Klan, African-Americans poured into Chicago, in four years doubling the city's black population. When Chicago's war veterans trod their weary way home and found their jobs filled, the guns saw action again: In July 1919, a white man murdered a black man on a beach, and Chicago's Irish- and African-American populations turned on each other. Eight days later, 38 Chicagoans had been killed.**

**Later that year, Prohibition would ignite the Beer Wars, which would nearly consume the city. By the end of Prohibition in 1933, gang violence would claim the lives of over 800 mobsters, policemen, and civilians. Chicago had paid the price for its corruption in full.**



**The war between rival gangsters claimed many victims in drive-by shootings.**

# PUBLIC ENEMIES

BY LEROY THOMPSON

**FROM SOPHISTICATED TO SIMPLE ROBBERIES, BANK ROBBERS OF THE GANGSTER ERA CREATED HAVOC**





Public Enemies, 2009, Movie Still Database photo

## **D**uring the 1920s and early 1930s, banks provided an appealing target for the "Public Enemies" that plagued the Midwest.

The sophistication level of the era's bank robbers varied greatly. The most professional gangs carefully gathered information about their target and any town law enforcement. They also would plan their getaway in detail.

Normally, backcountry roads would be used so it was necessary to prepare detailed maps, as all but major roads were generally not marked. In some cases, robbers would leave gas cans in a cache along the getaway route or even stash a car for a quick change to confuse pursuers.

One of the trademarks of Depression-era bank robbers was the use of overwhelming firepower. Robbers would acquire Browning Automatic Rifles (BARs) or Thompson SMGs. They preferred to avoid shootouts, however, as dead citizens or officers would give law enforcers a greater incentive to track them down.

In no particular order, following are the top bank robbers of the era.

**“They might drive into a town and impulsively go into a bank, guns blazing and rob it.”**



Although Bonnie and Clyde were well known for the willingness to shoot it out with law officers and for their well-publicized life in crime, they were not really among the most successful bank robbers.  
(NARA photo)

#### BONNIE AND CLYDE

Some bank robbers were much less organized. They might drive into a town and impulsively go into a bank, guns blazing, and rob it.

Bonnie and Clyde exemplify this type of bank robber. The couple was far more likely to rob a gas station or country store, often leaving dead bodies, but they did commit bank robberies—just not at a professional level.

#### DILLINGER

Although he was not the most proficient bank robber of the era, John Dillinger's notoriety probably made him the best known. The fact that many of the other famous criminals of the era, such as George "Baby Face" Nelson (Lester Gillis), Homer Van Meter and "Red" Hamilton, were part of Dillinger's gang only added to his notoriety.

Beginning in 1933, Dillinger and

his gang robbed various banks across the Midwest, garnering about \$300,000 (a little under \$5,400,000 in current dollars). Firepower and audacity trumped sophistication for Dillinger and, as related below, he was willing to learn from more cerebral bank robbers.

Dillinger's notoriety made bankers and law officers especially fearful of him robbing the local bank. For example, on June 30, 1934, the Dillinger gang hit the

Merchant's National Bank in South Bend, Indiana. Dillinger and four accomplices carried out the robbery with two staying outside and Dillinger and two others entering the bank. Dillinger fired a burst of fire from his Thompson into the ceiling.

As they exited the bank, Dillinger brought out a bank officer for use as a human shield. As they fled, they fired bursts over the head of a crowd that had gathered in the street. This robbery was the last one Dillinger would carry out and netted \$28,439 (about \$500,000 today).

The robbery had such an impact in South Bend that the Studebaker Company, which was based there, built a special vehicle with gun ports in the windshield to pursue Dillinger or other bank robbers in the future.

## "PRETTY BOY" FLOYD

Charles Arthur "Pretty Boy" Floyd was a prolific bank robber, hitting more than 30 banks, mostly in Ohio and Oklahoma. For his war on banks, Floyd was considered a hero by many during the Depression. Floyd often partnered with George Birdwell. Many of the bank robberies by Floyd and Birdwell did not produce large amounts of cash, ranging from \$400 to \$3,850.

Birdwell met his end when he, along with Charles Glass and C.C. Patterson, attempted to rob the Farmers and Merchants Bank in Boley, Oklahoma, on the first day of bird hunting season. Birdwell was shot by the bookkeeper in the bank, while the other two were shot by locals armed with shotguns as the exited the bank.

## BARKER GANG

Another well-known bank robbery gang was the Barker-Karpis gang, which was also known sometimes as the Barker gang. "Ma" Barker, the mother of Fred and Arthur Barker, is often associated with the gang, though she appears to have not taken an active part in the robberies.

After a string of bank robberies and various murders, Arthur Barker was arrested in 1935. He was eventually killed trying to escape from Alcatraz. Fred and his mother were killed in a shootout with the FBI in Florida, also in 1935.

Another well-known member of the gang, Alvin "Creepy" Karpis was the last "Public Enemy No. 1" of the Depression era gangsters to be captured. He spent 26 years in Alcatraz.

Although the Barker-Karpis gang robbed banks, they are probably best

## 9 VIOLENT MONTHS: THE DEMISE OF THE BANK ROBBERS

***The criminal life caught up with most of the high profile bank robbers in nine violent months between May 1934 and January 1935.***

## **Bonnie and Clyde: Shot and killed by police May 23, 1934**

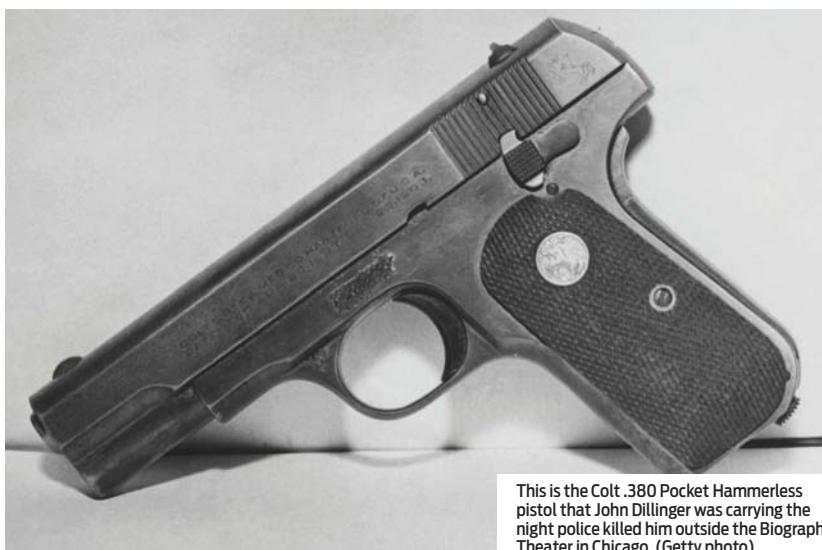
## **John Dillinger: Shot and killed by police July 22, 1934**

**“Pretty Boy” Floyd: Shot and killed by police Oct. 22, 1934**

**“Baby Face” Nelson: Shot and killed by police Nov. 27, 1934**

**Ma Barker and son Fred: Shot and killed by police Jan. 16, 1935.**

Police uncover a cache of guns after the Dillinger gang escaped a raid at the Little Bohemia Lodge in Manitowish Waters, Wisconsin.  
(Getty photo)



This is the Colt .380 Pocket Hammerless pistol that John Dillinger was carrying the night police killed him outside the Biograph Theater in Chicago. (Getty photo)



Wanted poster for Fred Barker of the Barker-Karpis gang. (NARA photo)



known for the kidnapping of William Hamm, a Minnesota brewer, and Edward Bremer, a St. Paul banker. The ransoms netted the gang \$100,000 and \$200,000 respectively, a total of approximately \$5,375,000 in today's currency.

Though the kidnappings were successful, they contributed to the demise of the gang, as Edward Bremer's father was a friend of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who helped focus the FBI's attention tracking down kidnappers as well as bank robbers. Of course, the 1932 Lindbergh kidnapping was another impetus for cracking down on kidnappers.

#### HERMAN LAMM

The most effective bank robber of the era is not as well known. Herman Lamm was a master planner who prepared for a robbery in detail. Under his supervision, members of his gang then carried out the actual robbery.

GETTY IMAGES



Photo of John Dillinger  
toting a Thompson  
submachine gun.  
(Getty photo)

## SMALL TOWNS WERE PRIME TARGETS

Many bank robbers targeted small town banks, which were easy prey. These small towns had virtually no professional law enforcement except perhaps a town constable, who would prove little deterrent to heavily armed criminals.

Until 1934, when bank robbery became a federal crime, bank robbers only needed to flee the jurisdiction where the robbery occurred to be relatively safe, though wanted posters would be sent out. Although it might be possible to phone nearby towns to alert them about the fleeing robbers, phones were far less common and reliable.

Small town banks often had substantial cash on hand to meet mill payrolls or from local farmers or merchants. This made them lucrative as well as easy targets. Not only that, but banks were not popular in many areas where farms, businesses and homes had been repossessed by these same banks.

Lamm did reconnaissance on banks before striking them and prepared detailed floor plans and notes on the types of safes. Each member of the gang was assigned a specific task. They rehearsed until they could follow a strict timetable. He even built full-scale mockups of banks about to be hit so his gang could practice. He timed them with stopwatches until they could perform with precision.

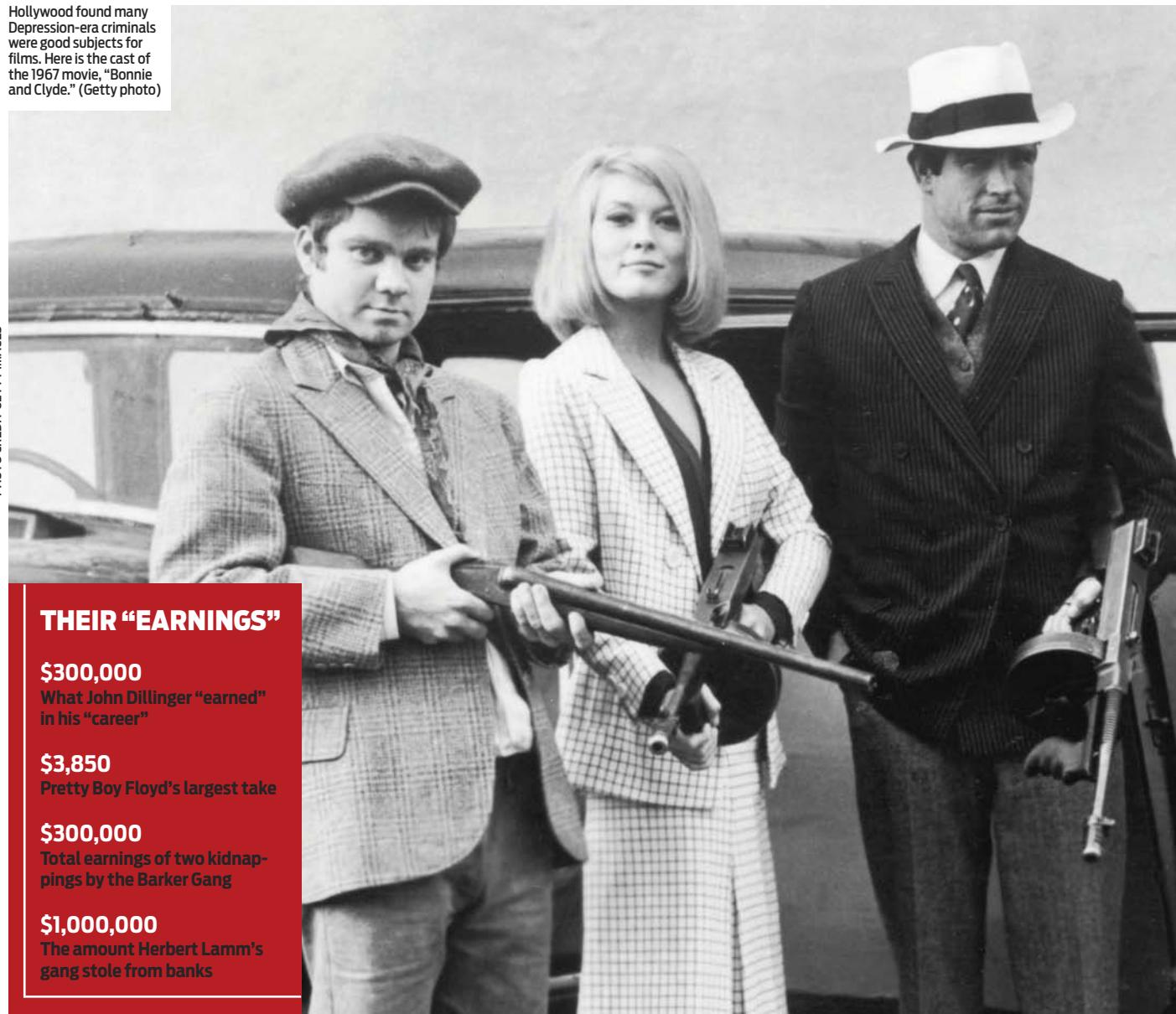
Lamm also checked various escape routes and prepared maps of them. He acquired vehicles that were not showy but had powerful engines, and he hired former racing drivers as wheelmen. Before a job, Lamm and the getaway driver would try the escape routes in various weather conditions.

By 1930, Lamm's gang had stolen more than \$1,000,000 from banks. However, Lamm's meticulous planning did not ensure success. In 1930, he killed himself rather than be arrested after a Clinton, Indiana, heist went bad, the result of a getaway driver panicking and getting a flat tire.

Dillinger benefited from Lamm's legacy, as he met two members of Lamm's gang, Walter Dietrich and James Clark, at the Indiana State Prison.

Hollywood found many Depression-era criminals were good subjects for films. Here is the cast of the 1967 movie, "Bonnie and Clyde." (Getty photo)

PHOTO CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES



### THEIR "EARNINGS"

**\$300,000**

What John Dillinger "earned" in his "career"

**\$3,850**

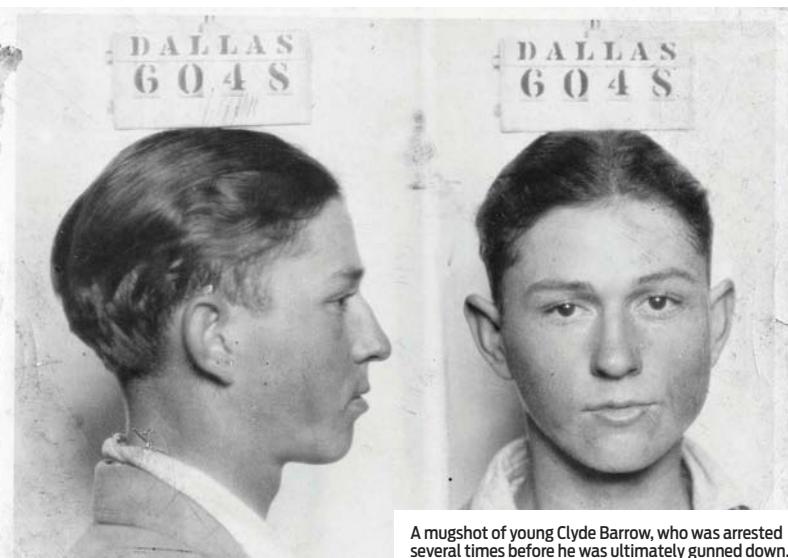
Pretty Boy Floyd's largest take

**\$300,000**

Total earnings of two kidnappings by the Barker Gang

**\$1,000,000**

The amount Herbert Lamm's gang stole from banks



A mugshot of young Clyde Barrow, who was arrested several times before he was ultimately gunned down.

Dillinger admitted them to his gang in return for them teaching him the "Lamm Technique" of bank robbery.

### WILLIE SUTTON

Although not normally known as one of the premier Depression-era gangsters, Willie Sutton was one of the best-known bank robbers, in part because he continued to rob banks and escape from prison long after most of his contemporaries were dead.

Sutton avoided violence whenever possible, though he normally carried a 1911 pistol or a Thompson SMG, which he claimed he never loaded. Sutton often used disguises such as that of a police officer or maintenance man to infiltrate the bank he was about to rob.

Sutton committed his first bank robbery in the early 1930s and his last



**“...Dillinger and his gang robbed various banks across the Midwest, garnering...a little under \$5,400,000 in current dollars.”**

bank robbery in 1950. During that stretch he had stolen more than \$2,000,000 from various banks.

#### **SHORT BUT LUCRATIVE**

Banks were appealing targets for 1930s gangsters because of the easy cash in the vaults. However, there was

#### **BANK ROBBER STRATEGY**

Most professional bank robbers preferred not to kill anyone during a robbery because it would be greater incentive for law enforcement to go after them.

another appeal to robbing banks. Bank robbers were considered the aristocrats of crime. The gang that could carry out successful bank robberies gained prestige with their contemporaries and the press.

Even law enforcement agencies tended to consider bank robbers a different breed of professional criminal. Of course, that also meant law enforcement agencies, especially the FBI, focused their energies on tracking down the bank robberies. That's a primary reason their careers were short.

*Leroy Thompson is a longtime gun writer and an expert in VIP protection, hostage rescue and counterinsurgency. GNSL*



Studebaker built this bullet-proof car complete with gun ports in the windshield for the pursuit of Dillinger and other bank robbers. (South Bend Historical Society photo)

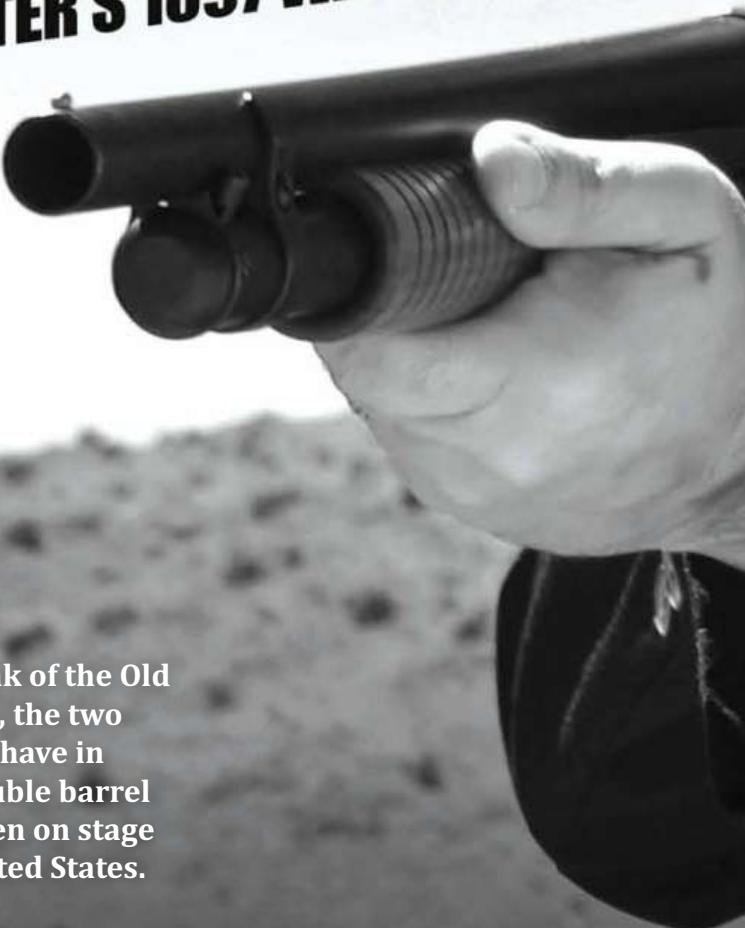
# INTIMIDATING PRESENSE

PHOTOS AND TEXT BY MIKE SEARSON

**FROM THE FRONTIER TO THE TRENCHES TO  
PROHIBITION, WINCHESTER'S 1897 WAS THERE**

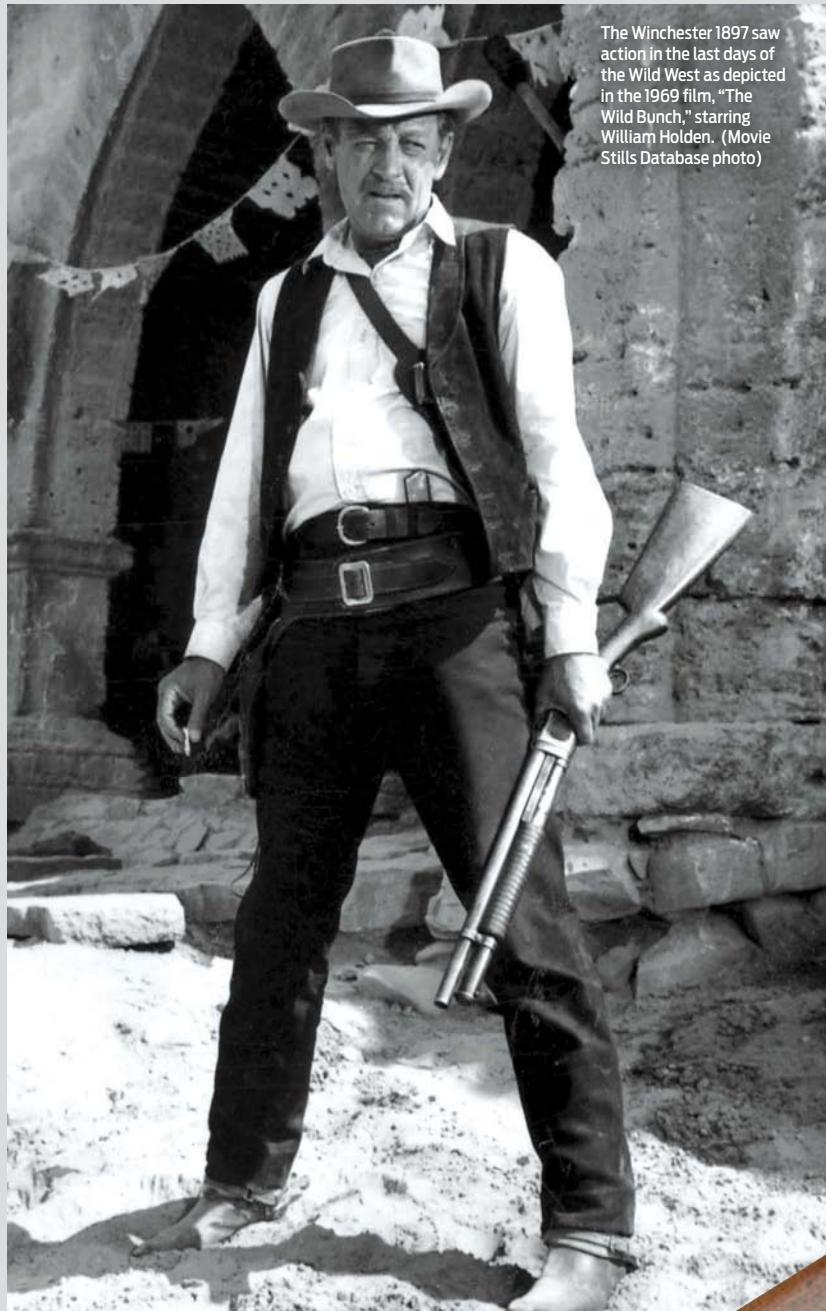
**W**hen most of us think of the Old West and shotguns, the two types we normally have in mind are single shot and double barrel pieces carried by Express men on stage routes crisscrossing the United States.

Yet there was another shotgun that saw a fair amount of use from the closing of the frontier to the trenches in France in World War I and on both sides of the law during the Roaring Twenties and Great Depression: a pump- action known as Winchester's Model 1897.

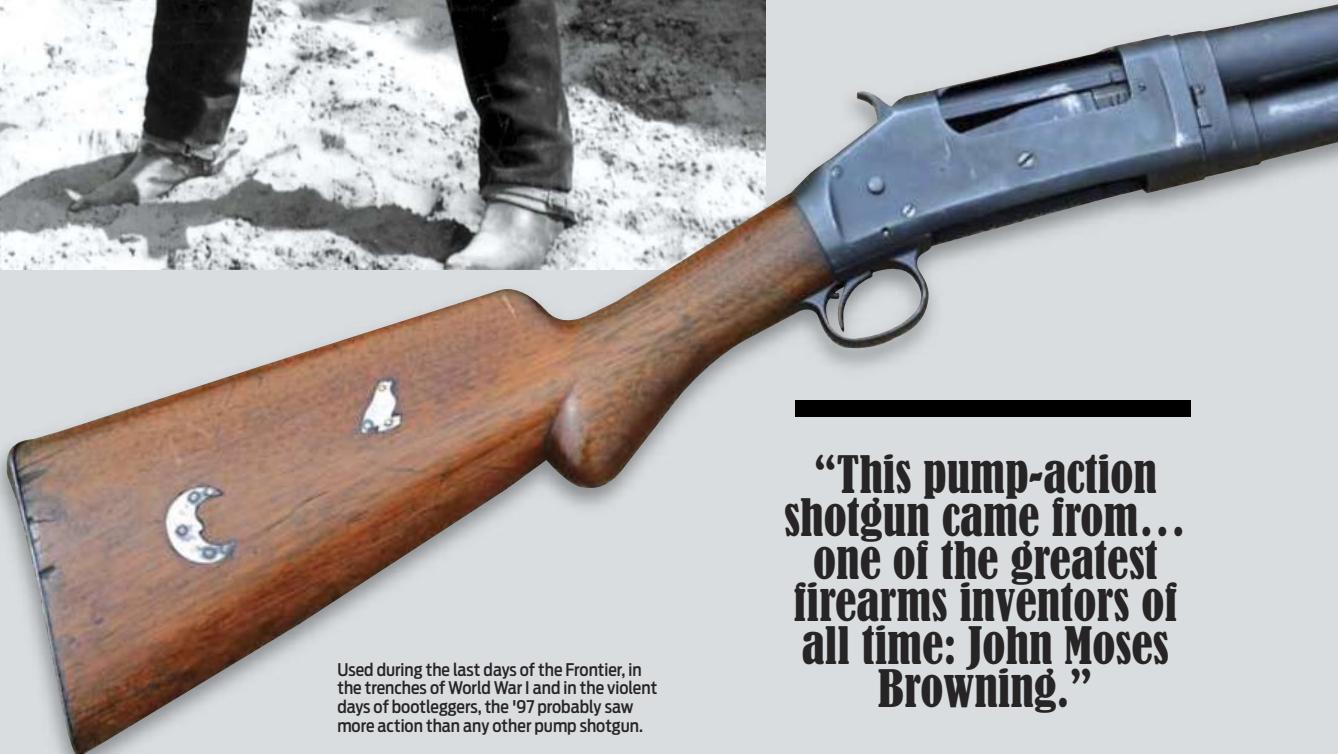




The Winchester Model 1897 Shotgun was the first successful pump-action shotgun designed for use with smokeless powder.



The Winchester 1897 saw action in the last days of the Wild West as depicted in the 1969 film, "The Wild Bunch," starring William Holden. (Movie Stills Database photo)



Used during the last days of the Frontier, in the trenches of World War I and in the violent days of bootleggers, the '97 probably saw more action than any other pump shotgun.

## HISTORY

This pump-action shotgun came from the fertile mind of one of the greatest firearms inventors of all time, John Moses Browning. It was based on an earlier design he came up with known as the Model 1893, only the 1897 version was manufactured with a thicker receiver to handle the latest inventions of the day: smokeless powder and 2 3/4-inch shotgun shells.

The 1897 had a solid top receiver to help eject shell casings to the side instead of into the shooter's face. The hammer was external and notably it lacked a disconnector, which allowed the 1897 to be slam fired by holding down the trigger and working the slide.

Winchester offered two basic versions of the 1897, a solid frame and a takedown frame. The latter allowed the shotgun to be broken down into two components (the barrel and magazine tube as one and the action and stock as another) for ease of storage.

Calibers offered were 16 Gauge and 12 Gauge with various grades of wood and barrel lengths from 20 inches to 36 inches. As gunslingers we are most interested in the 20-inch barrel length, better known as the "Riot Gun" configuration and later the infamous "Trench Gun" of World War I.

**"This pump-action shotgun came from... one of the greatest firearms inventors of all time: John Moses Browning."**



Winchester's logo appears on the single charge bar as opposed to the receiver on the 1897 shotgun.



The Winchester 1897 shotgun was offered in both 16 and 20 LC Gauge versions.

#### SHOOTING AND MAINTAINING THE 1897

Even though the majority of the Model 1897s were made in the years after the introduction of smokeless powder, many samples are still older guns that have been shot numerous times. As strong as the action is on the venerable 1897, we recommend the lighter 12-gauge loads to avoid damage to the shotgun or the shooter.

A lot of these old pump shotguns were "rode hard and put away wet," and one of the weaknesses in the design is that it relies on a single charge bar instead of the more familiar dual charge bars found on the majority of pump shotguns.

From banging around in pickup trucks to long-term use of holding down the trigger and hosing targets for fun, this is a part very prone to breakage and often in need of repair or replacement.

As a shooter, the lack of the disconnector makes the trigger extremely nice, with a low breaking point compared to modern pump shotguns. Shooters new to the Model 1897 should be wary of the external hammer and the unenclosed bolt as it has been known to strike the shooter in the hand or face when the shotgun is not held properly.

**“...notably it lacked a disconnector, which allowed the 1897 to be slam fired by holding down the trigger and working the slide.”**



The Winchester 1897, with its external hammer, continued to be manufactured and used long after more modern designs were offered.

The Winchester 1897 shotgun starred in the 1997 movie, "The Untouchables." Oh yes, Kevin Costner was in it too and portrayed Eliot Ness. (Movie Still Database photo)



Charles Martin Smith as Agent Oscar Wallace wields an 1897 shotgun in the 1987 movie, "The Untouchables." (Movie Stills Database photo)

#### THE TRENCH MODEL

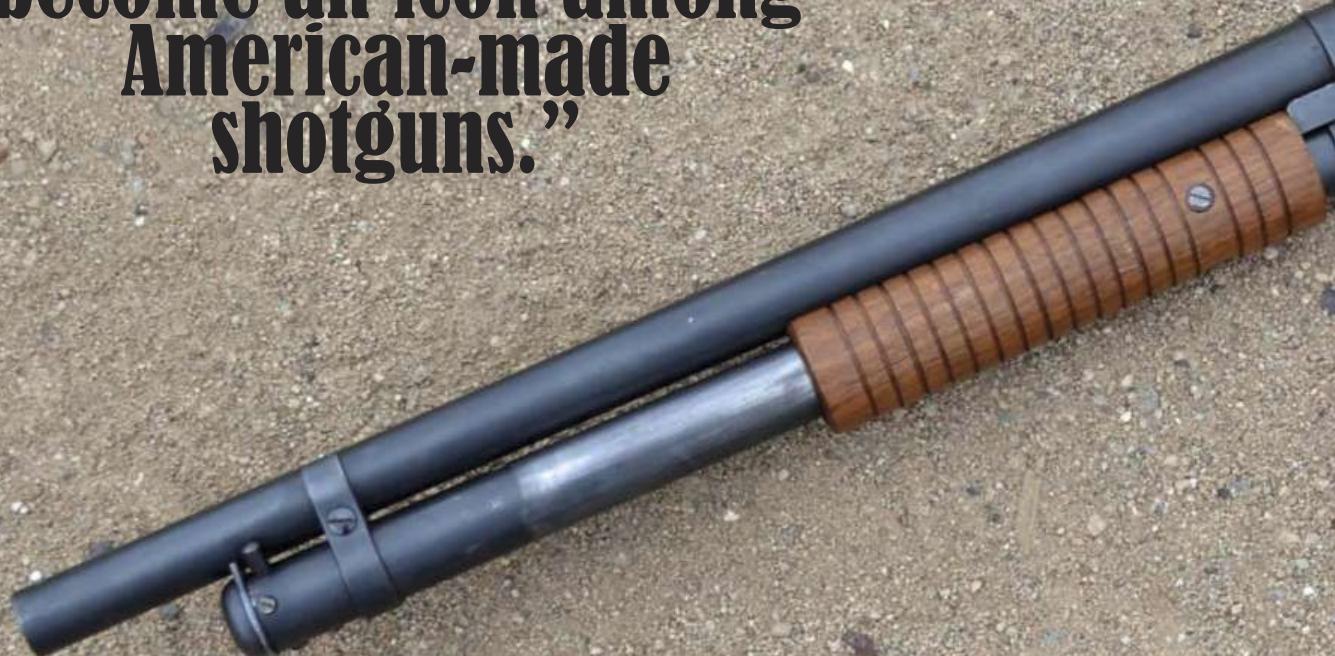
Winchester's trench gun has several distinct characteristics from the standard riot version. The most notable of these are the ventilated heat shield and bayonet lug attached to the barrel.

The heat shield protected the shooter and his teammates from the hot barrel when used in close quarters battle, and the bayonet lug allowed the attachment of a foot-long M1917 sword bayonet to be attached for use when the shotgun ran dry in battle.

The other difference is a sling swivel attached to the rear of the butt stock with the front swivel as part of the heat shield to allow a soldier or Marine to sling his shotgun when necessary.

If there was one constant complaint about the Model 1897 it came from one source: the German Government (a.k.a. the bad guys we used the M1897 against).

# “...the Winchester Model 1897... has become an icon among American-made shotguns.”



On Sept. 19, 1918, Germany issued a formal diplomatic protest against the American use of the Model 1897, stating that it was prohibited by the 1907 Hague Convention: "It is especially forbidden to employ arms, projections or materials calculated to cause unnecessary suffering."

Apparently to the Kaiser it was OK to use mustard gas, but our Doughboys were not allowed to use a five-shot pump shotgun. America dismissed the objection, and our side continued to use it to clear out bunkers as well as to shoot potato masher hand grenades out of the air as done in a trap or five-stand match.

Before you run out to the nearest gun show to find one of these old models, bear in mind that many old 97s have been converted into trench gun variants. Most are labeled as such, but unscrupulous vendors still try to pass off reproductions as the real thing. About the surest way to tell an original from a reproduction is the presence of the "U.S." marking with the Ordnance Department's "Bursting Bomb" proof mark situated on the receiver.

## A LEGENDARY GUN

From the dusty trails of the waning days of the Old West to the trenches of France to the speakeasies and wet alleys of the roaring 1920s, the Winchester Model 1897 proved itself to be a contender and has become an icon among American made shotguns. **GNSL**

### MODERN USE OF THE 1897

Despite the introduction of the Winchester Model 12 in 1912, which made use of an internal hammer, the 1897 persevered and was used in conflicts as late as the Vietnam War. Winchester produced more than one million Model 1897s by the time it was removed from production in 1957.

Due to its dates of manufacture, the Model 1897 is approved for use in SASS competitions, Wild Bunch matches and Zoot Shooter competitions.

Older shotguns could be had at reasonable prices for decades, but their use in these various shooting matches has put a premium on them as shooters rather than collectibles. There are modern-made versions produced in Italy and several Chinese reproductions offered by firms such as IAC.

Fit and finish on the IAC shotguns leaves a little to be desired, but there are gunsmiths out there known for cleaning up the actions and making decent shooters from them.

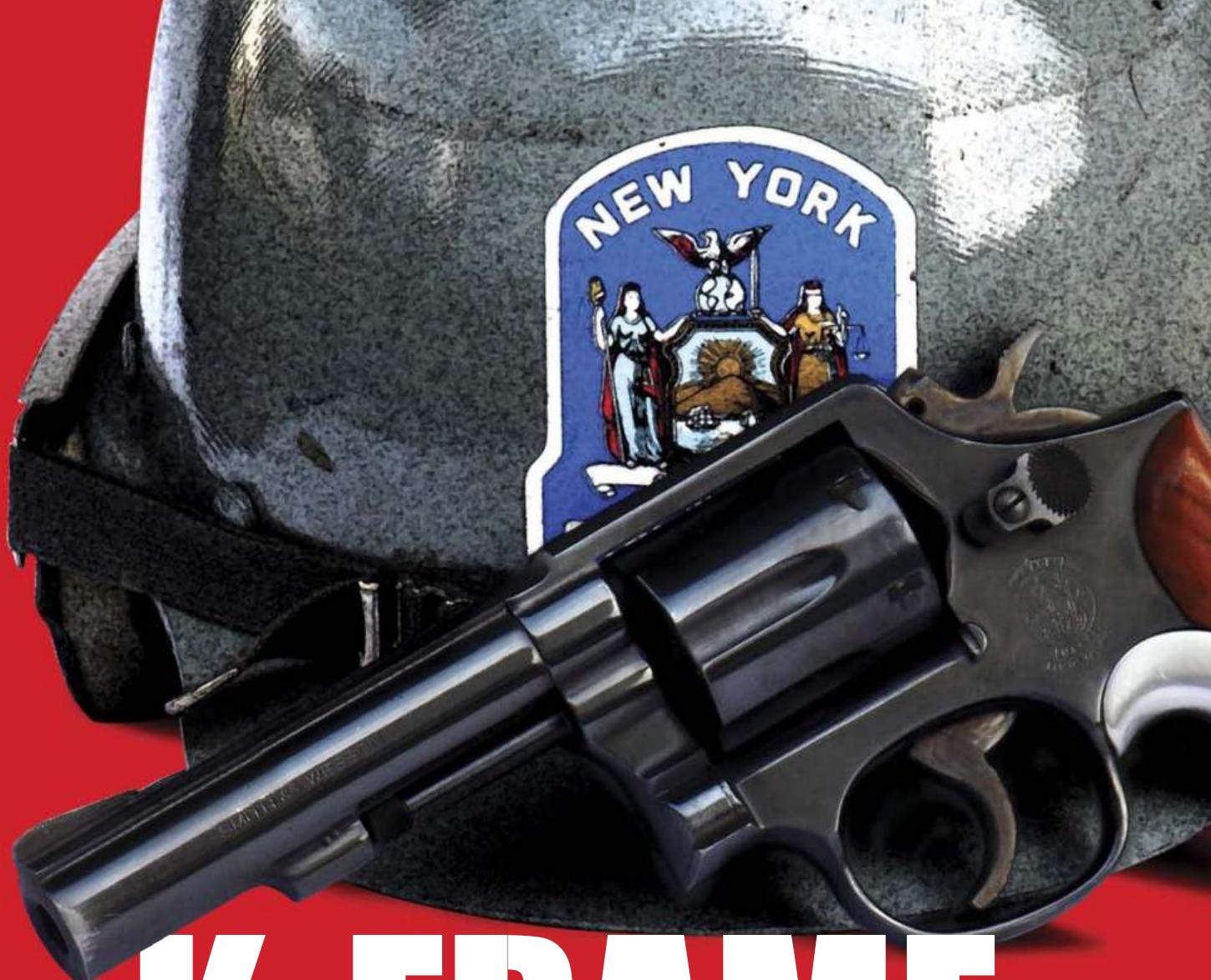


The rear of the 1897's receiver is open, allowing the bolt to cock the external hammer.



The majority of Winchester 1897 Riot Guns were configured as take down models for ease of storage in police cars.





# K-FRAME CLOUD

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY BOB CAMPBELL

**SMITH & WESSON'S MILITARY & POLICE  
REVOLVER SPANS THE GENERATIONS**



**I**sometimes wonder if those purchasing a new Smith & Wesson Military & Police self-loading pistol or AR-15 rifle realize that the name began with a .38 Special revolver at the turn of the previous century.

The Military & Police revolver was introduced in 1899 and became one of, if not the most, successful firearms of all time. At one time, the .38 Special M & P revolver armed 75 percent of our police officers.

By the gangster area, the Smith & Wesson Military & Police revolver was the peace officer's default gun and the one everyone else wanted. Why? First, it was light and handy enough but still offered a modicum of power. Second, Smith & Wesson had made a name for themselves with double action revolvers that could always be trusted. Third, the Military & Police was affordable.

During the Gangster Era the bad guys, at least the ones at the top, were rolling in money. The cops were cash strapped. The Military & Police revolver made sense as an issue handgun. It was useful for the best trained officers and didn't scare the ones that didn't practice.

Though the .38-44 Heavy Duty and .44 Special Triple Lock may seem more exciting, the Military & Police revolver got into many more gunfights. It wasn't the most powerful revolver, but the mid-frame .38 Special revolver handled well, was fast into action and offered all of the recoil the average shooter could handle.

After all, there was very little in the way of police training in those days.



During the late 1920s and well into the 1930s, top-break revolvers such as the Perfected Double Action, top, and the Safety Hammerless, below, served side by side with the Military & Police revolver.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE M&P

The Military & Police revolver was a result of dissatisfaction with the Colt 1892 Army revolver. Even before the problems with terminal effect in the Philippines, the Army was looking for a more robust and reliable revolver as well as a more powerful revolver.

The Military & Police revolver, introduced in 1899, featured a reliable lockwork. The .38 Smith & Wesson Special cartridge is based on the .38 Long Colt. This was done not only to offer a more powerful cartridge, but to allow the Army to use stores of .38 Colt ammunition. The .38 Colt chambers handily in the .38 Special cylinder, but not vice versa because the .38 Special is slightly longer than the .38 Colt.

The Colt cartridge produced 750 fps with a 152-grain bullet. The .38 Special jolts a 158-grain bullet to 850 fps. While no powerhouse, the .38 Special was more powerful than the .38 caliber cartridges that came before.

The revolver was also called the

Hand Ejector. The original Hand Ejector, introduced nearly a decade before the Military & Police, was a small frame double-action revolver with a swing-out cylinder, chambered for the .32 Smith & Wesson Long cartridge. The .32 Hand Ejector saw service with many police agencies and so did the five shot .38 Smith & Wesson caliber revolvers.

Even during the gangster era, cops in small towns often carried .32 Regulation Police revolvers. The K-frame gun, as the S&W factory designated the Military & Police, was a more formidable revolver.

## THE M&P EVOLVES

The revolver originally did not incorporate an ejector rod locking lug under the barrel. This was added in 1902. Since both cops and gangsters used their guns as saps and koshes (bad buys usually used the word sap, Cops, especially in Canada, said kosh) this strengthened area was a good idea.

Other changes included a choice of

round butt or square butt, and barrel lengths of 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 inches. By far the most popular was the 5-inch barrel in early revolvers with the 4-inch barrel gaining momentum by World War II. The 2-inch version was a popular plain-clothes revolver not introduced until well after World War I.

The lockwork received an improvement prior to World War I, with an automatic hammer block ensuring "drop safety." Although referred to the Model 10 out of habit, the revolver was not given that numerical designation until 1957.

The Smith & Wesson went through several upgrades, but we are primarily concerned with the handling characteristics that made the revolver so popular and so effective. Tom Ferguson, one of the greatest police writers of all time, called the Military & Police revolver the "Gunfighter's Gun of the Twentieth Century."

The sights are good fixed sights that will never go out of adjustment. The



Short-barrel handguns proved popular in urban situations; a 2-inch barrel .38 easily fits in a coat pocket.



This heavy barrel .38 was once issued to the SC Highway Patrol. Note Hogue grips and left-hand Gould and Goodrich holster.

This is a well-worn, 4-inch barrel .38 Special. Note 200-grain Super Police handloads.



Note the lanyard ring, small grips and 5-inch barrel of this Victory Model .38.



**“The agent turned, drew his Smith & Wesson Military & Police revolver, and fired five times before the perpetrator could return fire.”**

The Victory Model made an important contribution to the war effort. Many were later supplied to emerging police forces in the Pacific.

action is smooth and reliable. It is fair to say that the Military & Police revolver is often pointed out as the predecessor of a number of modern classic handguns, but none replaced the rock solid Military & Police.

The Military & Police revolver was the first K-frame revolver. The “I” frame .32 was smaller, and the “N” frame, introduced in 1907, was a larger .44 frame revolver. (The small “J” frame replaced the “I” frame.)

Though the Military & Police revolver is the most famous “K” frame, the other “K” frame revolvers are also good handguns. The Military & Police target sighted revolver, as an example, did not feature the sighting rib, high-grade sights and other improvements of the Combat Masterpiece revolver.

The Military & Police revolver survived for so many years because the handgun has the ideal grip size and heft for the average shooter. There is plenty of leverage for working the trigger action. The Military & Police was also well finished, usually in blue, but sometimes in nickel. (World War II models were parkerized.)

#### **SPECIAL .38 SPECIALS**

During Prohibition and the gangster era of the 1930s, a number of custom renditions of the Smith & Wesson Military & Police revolver were turned out. Ed McGivern, the famed fast and fancy revolver shooter, often carried a special 2 7/8-inch barrel round butt .38 Special. This revolver isn’t too different from the Model 13 later issued to the FBI.

The FBI found that revolvers with barrel lengths shorter than 3 inches sometimes did not fully eject cartridge cases during speed loads and adopted the 3-inch barrel Model 13 after experience with a special order 2 1/2-inch barrel Model 10.

The revolver is light enough at less than 35 ounces in most models, and the natural point is good. A target-sighted M & P .38 seems among the most popular revolvers of the professional class of shooter.

The Military & Police 10-6 was a revolver with a lengthened cylinder to accommodate the .357 Magnum cartridge, and the FBI and the NYSP obtained these revolvers. The designation was later changed to Model 13 to differentiate between these revolvers and .38 Special revolvers.

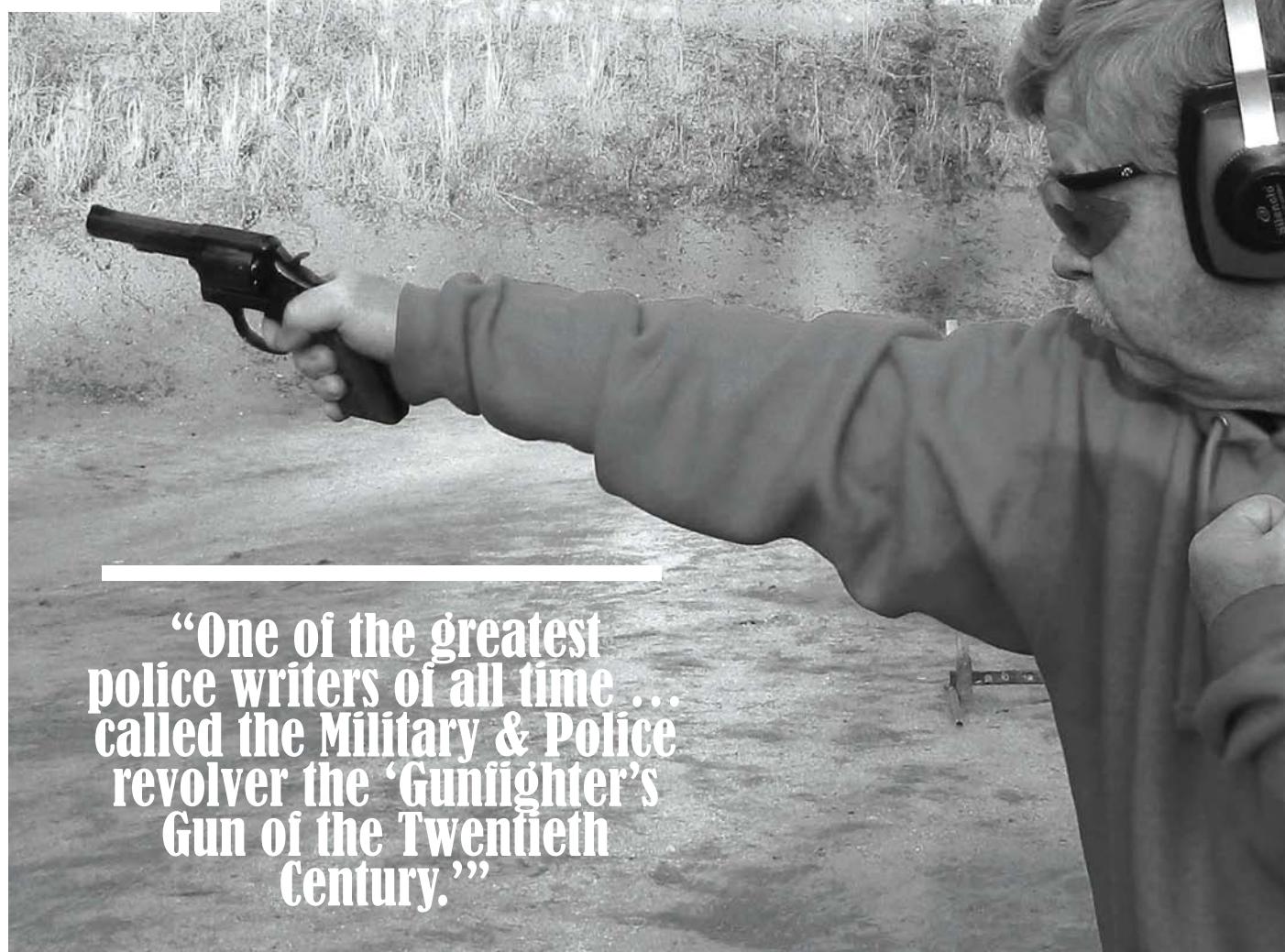
The Military & Police revolver also went to war. During World War II, more than half a million Victory Models supplied the Allies and the United States. British revolvers were chambered for the .38-200 cartridge, while American revolvers chambered the .38 Special. The “V” for Victory prefix and Parkerizing denote the Victory Model. These revolvers remained in service with CID, aircrew and other units until about 1981.

During the service life of the .38 Special, superior loads were developed to give the cartridge a measure of authority. The 200-grain Super Police was among the first and later +P hollow point loads gave the revolver good authority.

As an example, I keep one of these revolvers as a house and safe gun loaded with the Black Hills Ammunition 125 grain +P. I do not feel ballistically challenged.

The revolver remains a joy to use and fire with +P loads and hand-filling Culina grips.

The author keeps his hand in with the revolver—the Military & Police is a fast revolver to an accurate hit!



“One of the greatest police writers of all time ... called the Military & Police revolver the ‘Gunfighter’s Gun of the Twentieth Century.’”



Left to right: 9mm Luger, .38 Special, .44-40, .44 Special, .45 Colt and ACP. The .38 Special offers good power in a modest-sized package.



Perhaps the most popular of all Model 10 revolvers was the Heavy Barrel variant. If there was a better combat revolver I have not seen it. The extra weight provides superb balance.

#### 4 MILLION SOLD

Today, anyone wishing to own the finest revolver and the most successful—with some 4 million units sold—would do well to own a Smith & Wesson Military & Police, Model 10 revolver. Some things wear well with age.

*Bob Campbell is an outdoor writer specializing in firearms and self defense. GNSL*

#### FAST IN A FIGHT

These are among the best balanced and fastest handling revolvers ever issued to any agency. As for fast handling, one story has stuck in my mind from the many books I have read on gunfighting and the FBI.

FBI agents are trained well and trained hard. In one incident a bank robber robbed a New York City bank where a Federal Agent happened to be cashing his paycheck. The agent turned, drew his Smith & Wesson Military & Police revolver, and fired five times before the perpetrator could return fire. The FBI agent had drawn against a gun in hand and won the battle. During the gangster era this type of action happened more than once in the big cities as FBI agents went about their daily chores.

Could these agents shoot? By 1935 there were 400 FBI agents. Interestingly one of the old timers, Jerry Campbell, who began his career with the Bureau in 1934, gave a demonstration for the local press in 1952. A San Francisco Chronicle story described Campbell and his agents (he was the SAC) firing rifles, pistols, shotguns and even machineguns backwards, behind their backs, and even between their legs. While a stunt, this type of shooting showed the absolute familiarity FBI agents had with their firearms.



A Smith & Wesson with Culina's finest grips and an original G-Man holster. (Holster found at a flea market in Fletcher, NC)



The author is putting a Colt .38 ACP Super through its paces.

# THE SUPER .38

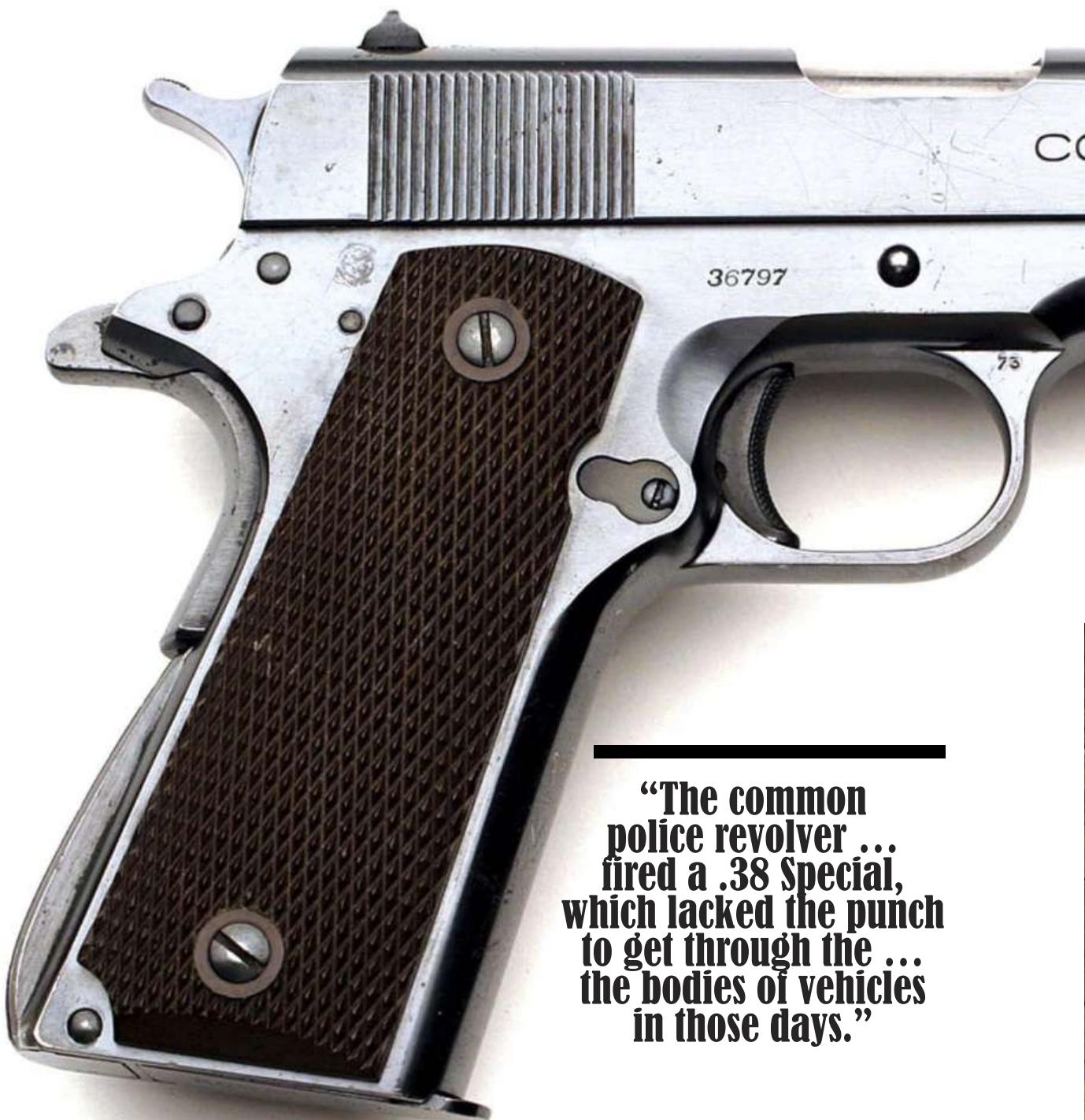
TEXT AND PHOTOS BY BOB CAMPBELL

**THIS POWERFUL CARTRIDGE  
DEBUTS DURING THE HEYDAY  
OF THE GANGSTER ERA**

**D**uring the height of Prohibition, Colt came out with a model of its famous 1911 pistol chambered in the powerful, flat-shooting .38 Super.

This was significant in the era of rival bootleggers committing drive-by shootings and bandits robbing banks in one jurisdiction, only to flee by automobile to the next.

The common police revolver then fired a .38 Special, which lacked the punch to get through the substantial metal in the bodies of vehicles in those days. The .38 Super was the most powerful handgun cartridge at the time and offered those on both sides of the law a means to reach their mobile adversaries.



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**“The common police revolver ... fired a .38 Special, which lacked the punch to get through the ... the bodies of vehicles in those days.”**

#### A LAWMAN'S FAVORITE

I know we call it the .38 Super these days, but Uncle Sid and everyone that carried and owned one when I was growing up called it the Super .38.

As a young patrol Lieutenant, I carried a Colt Commander .38 Super complete with Bar-Sto barrel and Bo-Mar sights, in a Don Hume holster, loaded with Winchester Silvertips.

Those were the golden days. The aura of the Super .38 is such that when I wrote “The Hunter and the Hunted” thriller novel, I had the chief's right-

hand man, D. Gonzullas, carry a nickel .38 Super in a fancy Kirkpatrick rig. It just seemed right for a Western lawman hunting monsters.

But there is little I can do to add or detract from the Super .38's reputation. The old Colt is among the most storied, loved and respected combinations in the world. It was used by G-Men, Baby Face Nelson and the OSS.

Here's the rub: Find someone that carries the piece these days. It isn't easy. The .38 ACP Super shoots flat, holds two more rounds than the .45 ACP, and of-

fers excellent light cover penetration. It is arguable that the select FBI agents armed with this pistol in the 1930s were among the best armed federal agents of all time. So, what is the story of the .38 Super? The story is one of rise and demise like many firearms.

#### RISE OF THE .38 SUPER

The original Colt 1900 self-loading pistol chambered the .38 ACP. This cartridge jolts a 130-grain FMJ bullet to about 1,150 fps. This was pretty hot for



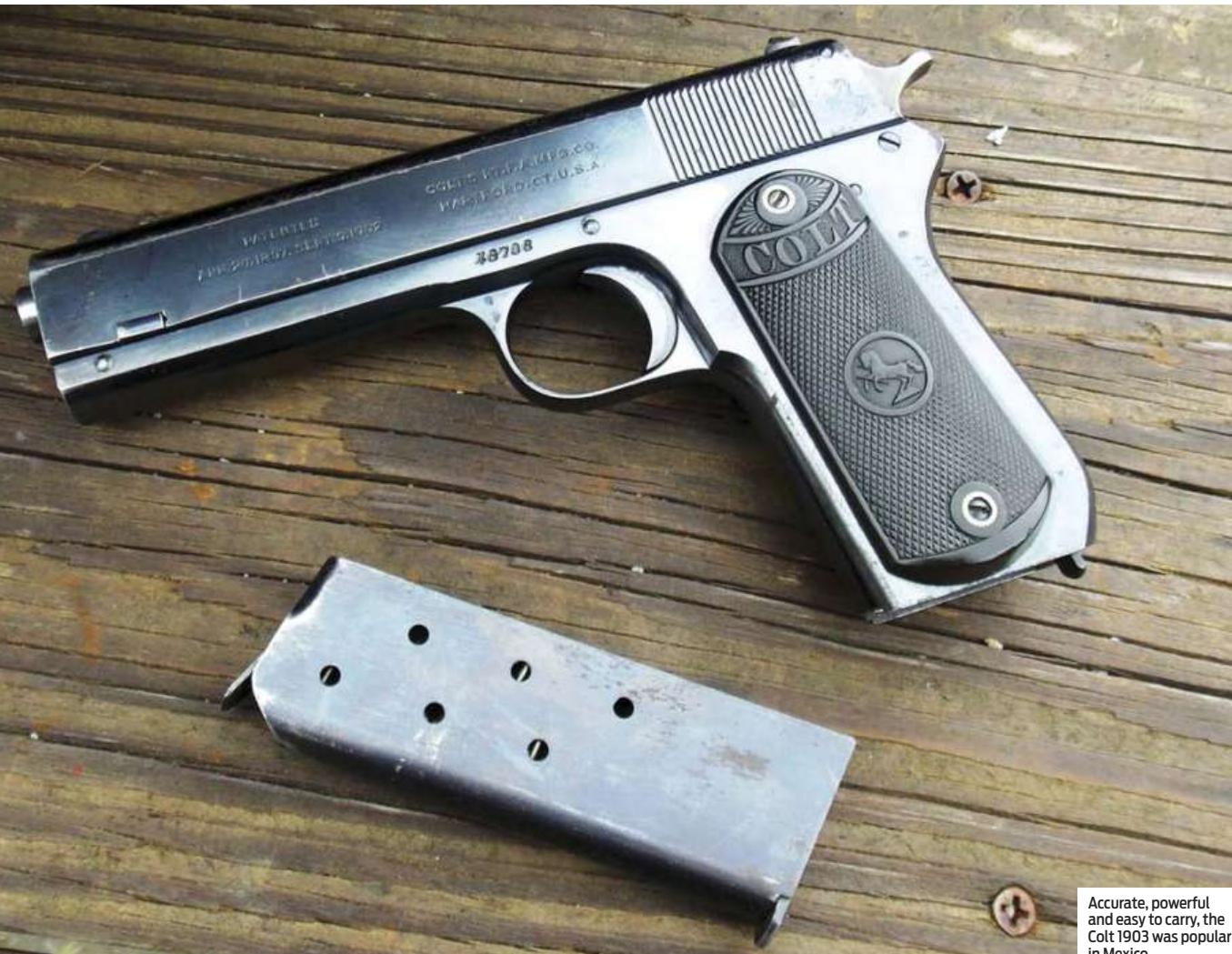
A rare early Colt .38 Super.  
(Courtesy Sam Lisker, Coltautos.com)

### 38 SUPER HEADSPACE ISSUES

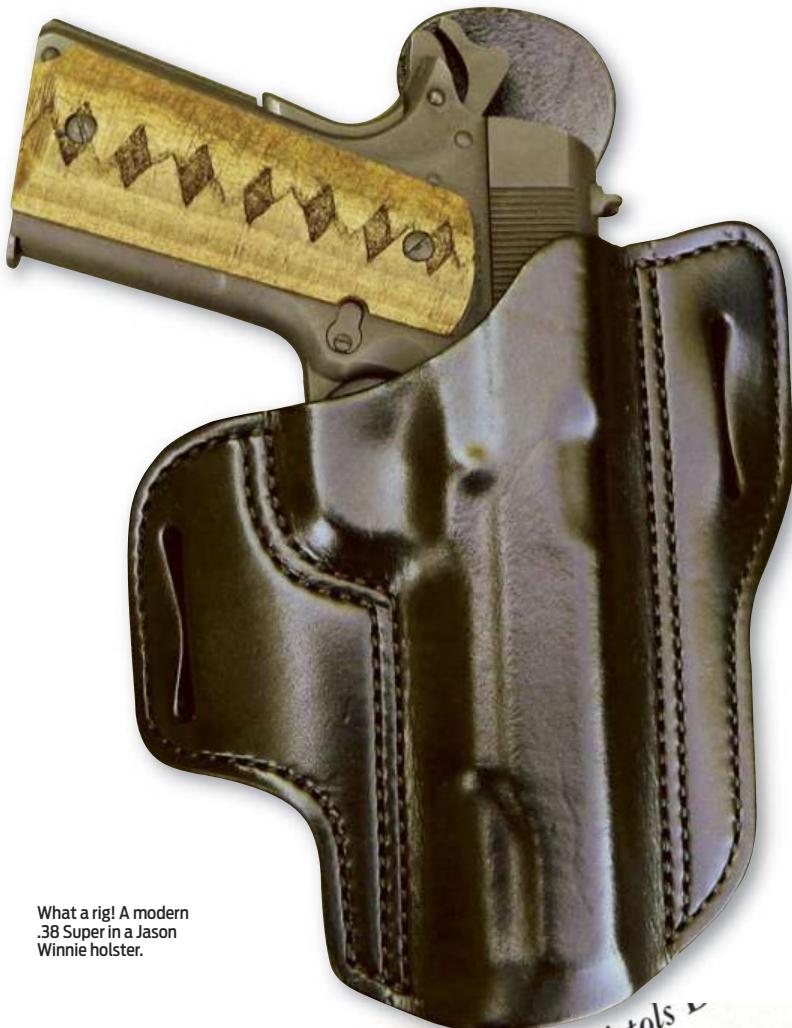
Among the complaints about the Super .38 was that the pistol was not particularly accurate. I have fired quite a few original Super .38s and, truth be told, it is hit and miss for accuracy.

Military standards for the Colt 1911 .45 was a 5-inch group at 25 yards. Though some .45s were more accurate, it seemed that the .38 Super wasn't. The old style, semi-rimmed cartridge headspaced on the case rim, while the .45 headspaced on the case mouth. This was blamed for the lack of accuracy.

Colt began properly chambering .38 Super pistols to headspace on the case mouth in 1981. Modern pistols, such as the stainless steel version I have fired extensively, are among the most accurate 1911 handguns.



Accurate, powerful and easy to carry, the Colt 1903 was popular in Mexico.



What a rig! A modern .38 Super in a Jason Winnie holster.

### .38 SUPERS FOR THE OSS

Although the standard caliber of the 1911 in World War II was .45 ACP, more than 1,500 Colt .38 Super pistols went to England before World War II.

From June to December 1945, Colt shipped, on factory order 5295, approximately 400 Colt 1911 .38 Super pistols first to the Resident Inspector of Ordnance at the Remington Plant and later the Pentagon building with the majority sent to the Fowler Building, Virginia, storage for the OSS.

Due to the date of shipment, none could have seen service in World War II. For various reasons, OSS operatives in Europe had asked for compact concealable pistols, but some also asked for the .38 Super. Very few of these handguns are known to exist today. One may only wonder what use they were put to and if the CIA still has them on hand.



other for presentation purposes, as special match prizes or the favorite shooter, Colts may be had in almost any special finish or decoration have always taken special pride and given the greatest attention to detail and arms. A Colt of any model (except .22 Automatic Pistol) in plain pearl or ivory stocks are identified as "Plain Stocks" or "Fancy Stocks, sent to the customer carved or engraved by the same expert engraver as the gun." This is the rarest of .38 Super pistols—an early factory engraved pistol. (Sam Lisker, Coltautos.com)

# “When the Super .38 became available, the bullet-proof vest no longer offered protection.”

the era—the .38 Colt revolver the Army adopted in 1892 generated 750 fps with a 152 grain bullet.

The Army may have adopted a .38 ACP automatic save for the mess with the Moros and poor results with the .38.

Next came the elegant 1903 Pocket Hammer .38 ACP, which used a parallel ruler type action balancing the barrel with two links, fore and aft, and also featured a ramped barrel. This pistol was eclipsed by the 1911 handgun but the 1903 Pocket Hammer was used in numbers during the Mexican revolution.

This would open the doors for the .38 Super. The 1903 Pocket Hammer wasn't an easy gun to manufacture, although reliable and accurate. Colt discontinued the pistol in 1927.

At this time Colt decided to chamber its 1911 pistol in .38 Super. Colt took advantage of the strength of the 1911 pistol and increased the powder charge to give the new .38 Super cartridge a solid 1,300 fps. While dimensionally identical to the .38 ACP, the Super should never be fired in a .38 ACP handgun.

Because the original Colt self-loader chambered a .900 inch long .38 ACP and Browning based the 1911 upon a .900 inch long .45 ACP cartridge case, it was a simple matter to offer a modified slide and proper barrel to chamber the .38 Super.

## WHY COLT DEVELOPED A 1911 IN .38 SUPER

*Colt had good reasons to chamber the 1911 for a .38 caliber cartridge.*

1. Mexico did not allow 9 mm or .45 ACP handguns. They were declared military wares. The .38 ACP was legal and represented an important export market for Colt.
2. Some preferred a light kicking .38 over the .45 and Colt no longer offered a .38 ACP automatic.
3. The new breed of mechanized bandit was making life hard for the police. Common revolver calibers had no chance of penetrating vehicle sheet metal. Many in those days were metal reinforced with heavy bracing as well.
4. Outdoorsmen were enjoying handgun hunting. Westerners kept a handgun handy because of wild animals. The high velocity .38 Super shot flat and was deemed a good small game cartridge.

The .38 Super, top, is smaller than the .45 ACP, bottom, but operates at higher pressure.



This is the ramped barrel arrangement of the Colt 1903 .38 ACP.



That little pony on the slide drives collectors to distraction.





## THE FBI, DILLINGER AND NELSON

The new pistol gave shooters two more rounds than the .45 ACP. The FBI in particular showed a lot of interest in the cartridge. The .38 Super figured into the hunt for John Dillinger among others. The Colt .38 Super was credited with the damage that stopped a car belonging to Baby Face Nelson. The .38 Super was fast into action, reliable, and offered the penetration police needed to combat mechanized bandits.

The Super .38 was also used by the bad guys. A specially modified Colt .38 Super with forward handgrip, long barrel, extended magazine and fully automatic action is on display in the FBI museum. This handgun was used by the Dillinger gang.

While the new Colt pistol and caliber gained an excellent reputation, it was never widely used in law enforcement.

## COMPETITION BY THE .357

The Colt saw use during the 1930s but was soon eclipsed by the .357 Magnum revolver. Introduced in 1935, the deluxe heavy frame Magnum was in demand by those who could afford it. The price of the Smith & Wesson 357 Magnum revolver was about three times that of other wheel guns.

We were a nation of revolver men in those days. The .357 Magnum had a considerable power advantage over the .38 Super, particularly with heavy bullets. The standard Keith-style handload for the .357 Magnum used a 173-grain lead hollow point at over 1,350 fps. There has never been a more effective law enforcement cartridge.

After World War II, affordable Magnum revolvers such as the Highway Patrolman and the K frame Combat Magnum pretty much eliminated any interest in the Colt Super .38.

## THE .38 SUPER TODAY

Today a few diehard fans keep the .38 Super alive. Colt still makes the .38 Super in the 1991A1 economy line as well as stainless steel versions. Folks tend to put fancy grips on the Colt Super .38 and like stainless and nickel versions.

There is something about owning a pistol that has a link with history. Sure, any 1911 is strong on history and emotional attachment, but the Super .38 has the lure of the lone FBI agent without backup or radio pursuing ruthless outlaws.

Frank Hamer, the legendary lawman that led the posse that killed Bonnie and Clyde, carried a Colt Super .38. The Super .38 is dashing, different, and exciting. And today we have modern loads that are more powerful and accurate than anything the FBI had in the 1930s. A good choice is the Winchester 125-grain Silvertip. The Silvertip offers



.45Maker.com offers a Westener rig that is typical of the high grade leather belts, holsters and magazine pouches worn by Western lawmen beginning after World War I. The Super .38 rode in quite a few of these.

excellent expansion in ballistic media.

Handloaders may make the .38 Super even more versatile. As an example, it isn't difficult to move a 90-grain Hornady XTP at a solid 1,600 fps from the 5-inch 1911 barrel. This load offers flat shooting to 100 yards and is deadly on game to the size of the big cats.

The .38 Super is a great personal defense and outdoors cartridge that combines a sense of history with real performance.

*Bob Campbell is an outdoor writer specializing in firearms and self-defense. GNSL*

### THE .38 SUPER VS. GANGSTERS' VESTS

One of the big problems during the gangster area was thugs wearing bullet-proof vests. Some were offered for sale at very low prices as military surplus from World War I, and others were manufactured in a cottage industry in the United States.

The primary function seems to have been protection from other gangsters but of course all hoodlums tried to obtain these vests, and the bullet proof vests put cops at a disadvantage. Interestingly many soldiers purchased their own vests during the war, but the vests were too expensive for many others.

By a quirk of history gangsters were able to afford new vests and surplus vests were cheap. During World War I, bullet proof vests with silk and cotton held together with resin were developed. These were the forerunner of the modern bullet proof vests still in use. A hard plate to stop heavy fire was in use as early as 1917.

These vests were designed to be effective at long range, and to protect pilots from shrapnel. They would stop a common revolver bullet at close range. The .38 Special used by most police would not penetrate a bullet proof vest. The .32s and short .38s were worthless. Even the .45 ACP with its 230 grain FMJ bullet would not usually penetrate a bullet proof vest. The new vests used by gangsters often used heavy cotton padding to shield the impact of a handgun bullet. If the gangster wore this vest the cops were at a great disadvantage.

The Super .38 changed that. When the Super .38 became available, the bullet-proof vest no longer offered protection. The 130 grain FMJ would penetrate the common vests of the day easily.



A modern .38 Super will do what the vintage guns will do—and more.





# THE WHEELGUN WAY

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY BOB CAMPBELL

## COLT'S DOUBLE ACTION REVOLVERS DOMINATE THE GANGSTER ERA

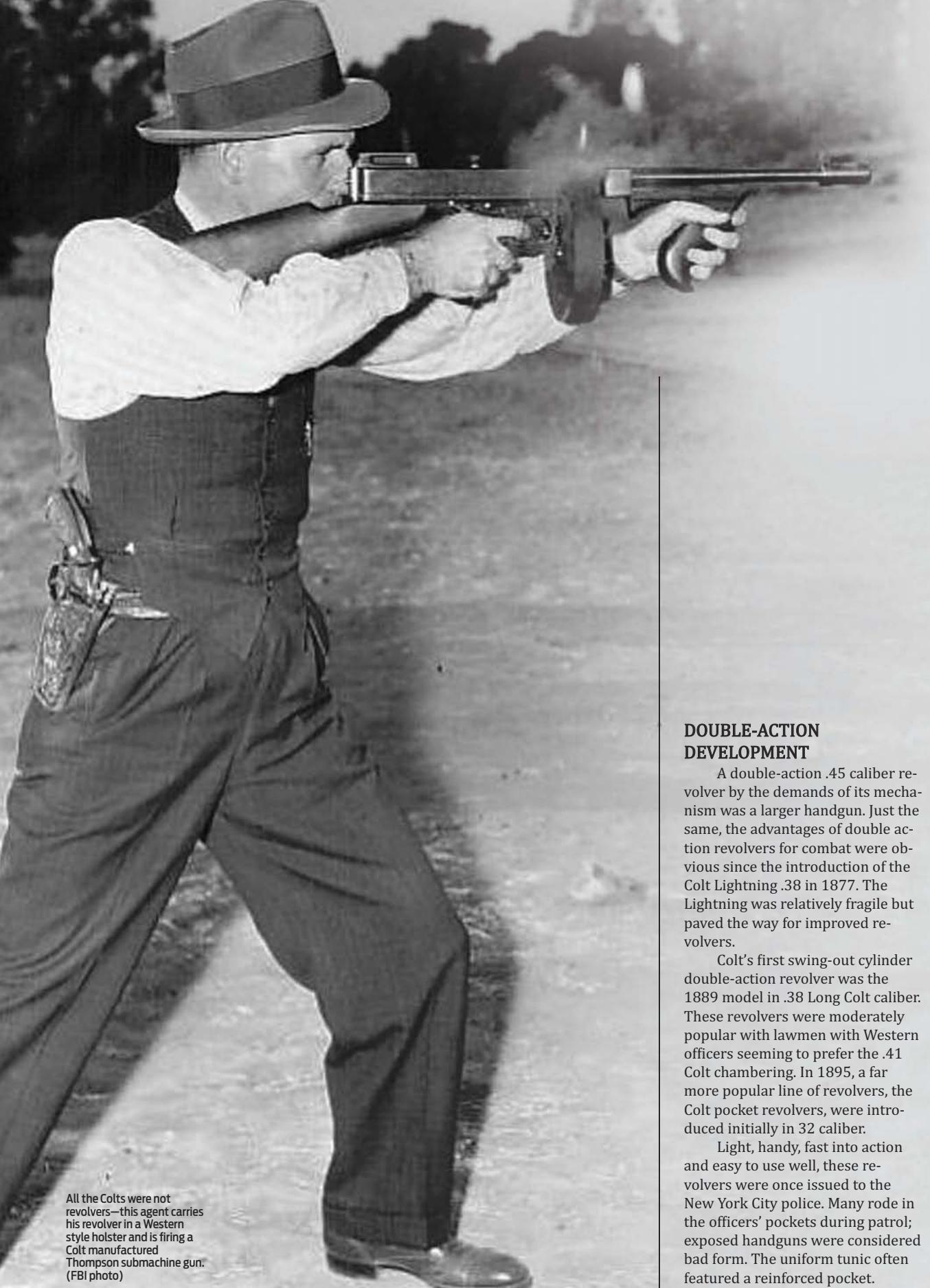
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**C**olt had a great presence during the gangster era. While the bread-and-butter-revolvers of the day were the double-action, swing-out cylinder .38s, other interesting revolvers were used by lawmen.

During this time, a number of Western lawmen clung to the dress and style of the Old West. Quite a few, such as Two Gun Hart, a decorated soldier and Prohibition agent, carried a brace of revolvers in Western holsters.

Frank Hamer adopted suits for town wear and carried his handguns concealed. The Colt Single Action Army, such as Hamer's engraved 4½-inch barrel .45 "Old Lucky" remained popular. This revolver was about as light as a double-action .38 caliber revolver, but it hit with greater authority.

For a more in-depth look, let's stroll back in time.



All the Colts were not revolvers—this agent carries his revolver in a Western style holster and is firing a Colt manufactured Thompson submachine gun. (FBI photo)

## DOUBLE-ACTION DEVELOPMENT

A double-action .45 caliber revolver by the demands of its mechanism was a larger handgun. Just the same, the advantages of double action revolvers for combat were obvious since the introduction of the Colt Lightning .38 in 1877. The Lightning was relatively fragile but paved the way for improved revolvers.

Colt's first swing-out cylinder double-action revolver was the 1889 model in .38 Long Colt caliber. These revolvers were moderately popular with lawmen with Western officers seeming to prefer the .41 Colt chambering. In 1895, a far more popular line of revolvers, the Colt pocket revolvers, were introduced initially in .32 caliber.

Light, handy, fast into action and easy to use well, these revolvers were once issued to the New York City police. Many rode in the officers' pockets during patrol; exposed handguns were considered bad form. The uniform tunic often featured a reinforced pocket.

## COLT POLICE POSITIVE

These revolvers were modified into the Colt Police Positive, which was available in .32 and short .38 calibers. The Police Positive Special was introduced in 1907. This revolver featured a longer cylinder for chambering the .32-20 WCF or its more popular chambering, the .38 Special.

The PPS was smaller than the Smith & Wesson Military & Police, another six-shot .38, but only slightly larger than the five-shot Smith & Wesson Terrier, which fired a short .38 caliber cartridge.

In 1926, the Colt Detective Special was launched. Simply a Police Positive Special with a 2-inch barrel, the Detective Special was an immediate success. This revolver was a favorite of FBI agent Melvin Purvis.

It is interesting to note that the "Positive" in the Colt Police Positive name came from the revolver's hammer block safety.

Colt also claimed that since the Colt cylinder rotated to the right, opposite of the Smith and Wesson, this forced the crane tighter in the frame also resulted in the hand locking against the cylinder with less play. While this seems true as far as it goes, it is also suggested by experienced gunsmiths that the Colt arrangement results in more momentum transferred to the small parts of the action during firing.

The great John Henry "Fitz" Fitzgerald commented on the need for a

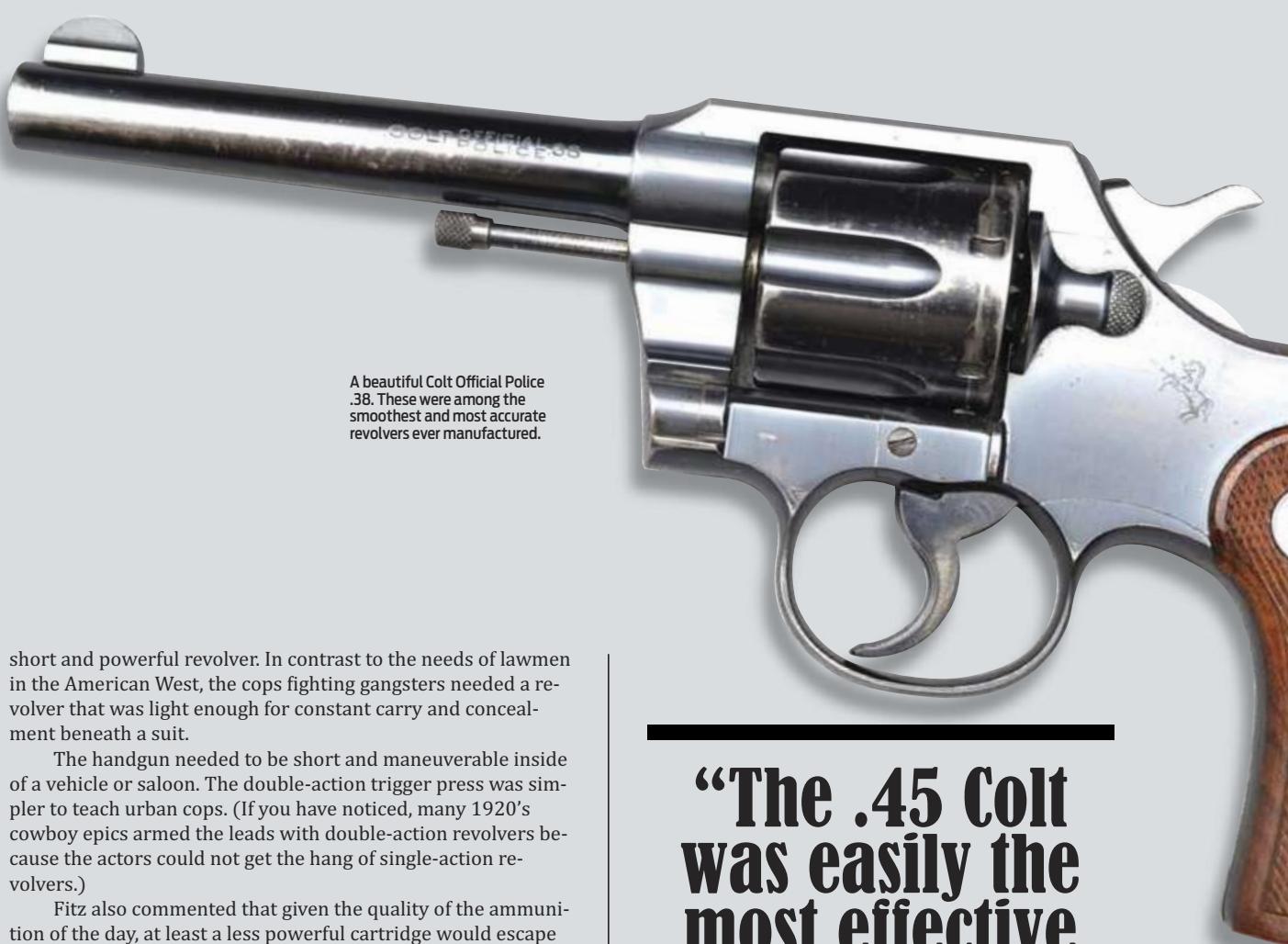
◀ The author's personal Colt 1917 is his outdoors revolver, often carried when wild animals might be a problem. The full moon clips make quick reloading possible.

▼ New York State Troopers have always been a brave lot—here they are matching the New Service against a bulletproof vest!



This is a 32 caliber Colt Police Positive once issued to the Railroad Police, an organization with astoried history.  
(Lt. Paul Miller photo)





A beautiful Colt Official Police .38. These were among the smoothest and most accurate revolvers ever manufactured.

short and powerful revolver. In contrast to the needs of lawmen in the American West, the cops fighting gangsters needed a revolver that was light enough for constant carry and concealment beneath a suit.

The handgun needed to be short and maneuverable inside of a vehicle or saloon. The double-action trigger press was simpler to teach urban cops. (If you have noticed, many 1920's cowboy epics armed the leads with double-action revolvers because the actors could not get the hang of single-action revolvers.)

Fitz also commented that given the quality of the ammunition of the day, at least a less powerful cartridge would escape the short barrel. Although Fitz championed the big bore revolver for concealed carry, he also helped developed short barrel .38 Special revolvers.

Many variations on the Fitz Special have been attempted. The originals were well made and properly modified. They featured short barrels, bobbed hammers, rounded grip frames and an open-front trigger guard. Many others involved simply shortening the barrel with no provision for a front sight.

#### COLT OFFICIAL POLICE

By far the most successful double-action Colt was the Army Special, later known as the Official Police.

Colt introduced this revolver in 1908. While the Police Positive Special was lighter than the Smith & Wesson Military & Police revolver, the Army Special was actually a ".41 frame" revolver, slightly heavier than the Smith & Wesson.

This revolver later formed the basis for the Colt Python revolver. In 1911, this revolver won the revolver class at the National Match and set a new record. While offered in a number of calibers, including .22 LR, the most popular police issue caliber was the .38 Special. This revolver was produced for more than sixty years. The action feels different than the Smith & Wesson and many marksmen preferred the Colt.

However, after World War II, Smith & Wesson invested in new machinery and aggressively sought the police market, eventually ousting Colt practically altogether by the late 1960s.

The Official Police remains a good solid revolver for personal defense. It is smooth handling, accurate and suitable for use with +P ammunition. This revolver was a favorite of noted gunfighter and U.S. Border Patrol Agent, Col. Charles Askins.

**"The .45 Colt was easily the most effective man stopper of the day."**

#### KEY YEARS FOR COLT DOUBLE-ACTION REVOLVERS

- 1877:** The double-action Colt Lightning introduced
- 1889:** Colt produces its first swing-out cylinder double-action revolver
- 1897:** New Service introduced
- 1907:** Police Positive introduced
- 1908:** Official Police introduced
- 1917:** New Service revolvers chambered in .45 ACP for use during World War I
- 1926:** Detective Special introduced
- 1940:** New Service discontinued
- 1969:** Official Police discontinued
- 1995:** Police Positive discontinued

## COLT NEW SERVICE

The best is last.

The Colt New Service was introduced in 1897. This was the largest double action revolver produced in America during the period, and the largest revolver produced for service use as well.

The Colt New Service combined a double-action mechanism and swing-out cylinder with a big bore cartridge. While chambered for many cartridges during its production run from 1897 to 1940, the .45 Colt was the most popular.

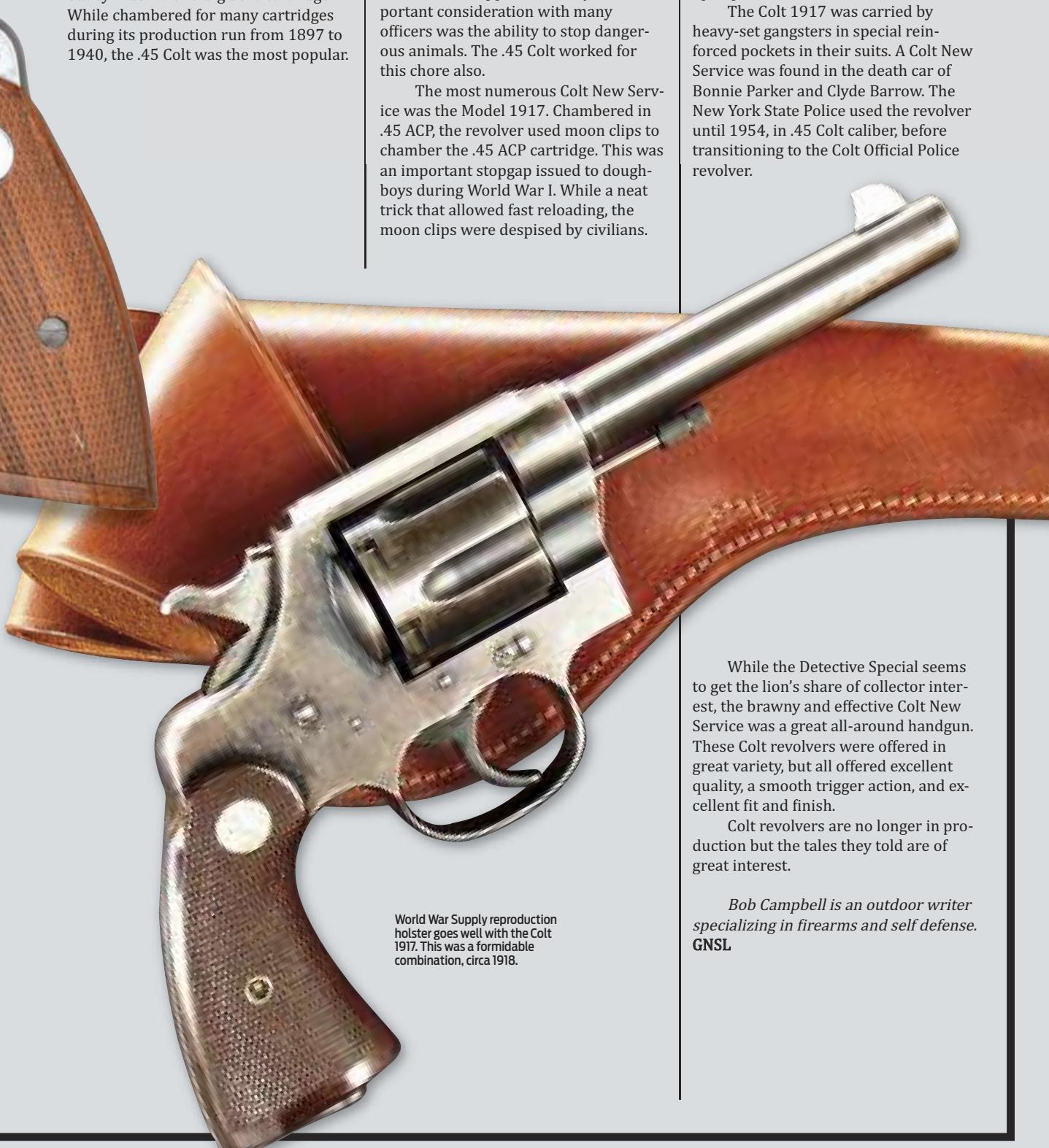
The New Service in .45 Colt was adopted by the New York State Police and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. These agencies were busy during the Prohibition period. The US Border Patrol also used these revolvers, but for some reason adopted a .38 Special variant.

The .45 Colt was easily the most effective man stopper of the day. An important consideration with many officers was the ability to stop dangerous animals. The .45 Colt worked for this chore also.

The most numerous Colt New Service was the Model 1917. Chambered in .45 ACP, the revolver used moon clips to chamber the .45 ACP cartridge. This was an important stopgap issued to doughboys during World War I. While a neat trick that allowed fast reloading, the moon clips were despised by civilians.

The Colt 1917 and the Smith & Wesson 1917 as well were available in great number after World War I. Some 156,000 Colts alone had been manufactured. These were issued to postal clerks and the Border Patrol. After Remington developed the .45 Auto Rim cartridge—a rimmed .45 ACP for use in the 1917 revolvers—outdoorsmen developed potent loads for these revolvers.

The Colt 1917 was carried by heavy-set gangsters in special reinforced pockets in their suits. A Colt New Service was found in the death car of Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow. The New York State Police used the revolver until 1954, in .45 Colt caliber, before transitioning to the Colt Official Police revolver.



World War Supply reproduction holster goes well with the Colt 1917. This was a formidable combination, circa 1918.

While the Detective Special seems to get the lion's share of collector interest, the brawny and effective Colt New Service was a great all-around handgun. These Colt revolvers were offered in great variety, but all offered excellent quality, a smooth trigger action, and excellent fit and finish.

Colt revolvers are no longer in production but the tales they told are of great interest.

*Bob Campbell is an outdoor writer specializing in firearms and self defense. GNSL*

# GANG GUNS

BY JIM DICKSON

**DESIGNED FOR THE MILITARY, THE  
TOMMY GUN AND M1911 WERE POPULAR  
IN STATESIDE WARFARE BETWEEN  
COPS AND ROBBERS**

**F**or a gangster on the run, the idea of a shoulder arm and a pistol firing the same cartridge could be very appealing. And when the cartridge is the .45 ACP and the guns are the Thompson submachine gun and Colt 1911 pistol, the combination is just about perfect.

Of course lawmen of the Prohibition era didn't overlook the benefits of those firearms either, and when they could get their hands on them, they used them to great effect. By the mid-1930s many of the nation's gangsters had been gunned down or were imprisoned.



# STER



Use of the Thompson submachine gun by gangsters is what led to the gun being restricted by the 1934 National Firearms Act. Here actor Stephen Graham portrays Baby Face Nelson in the 2009 film, "Public Enemies." (Movie Stills Database photo)



## AMMO COMPATIBILITY NOT NEW

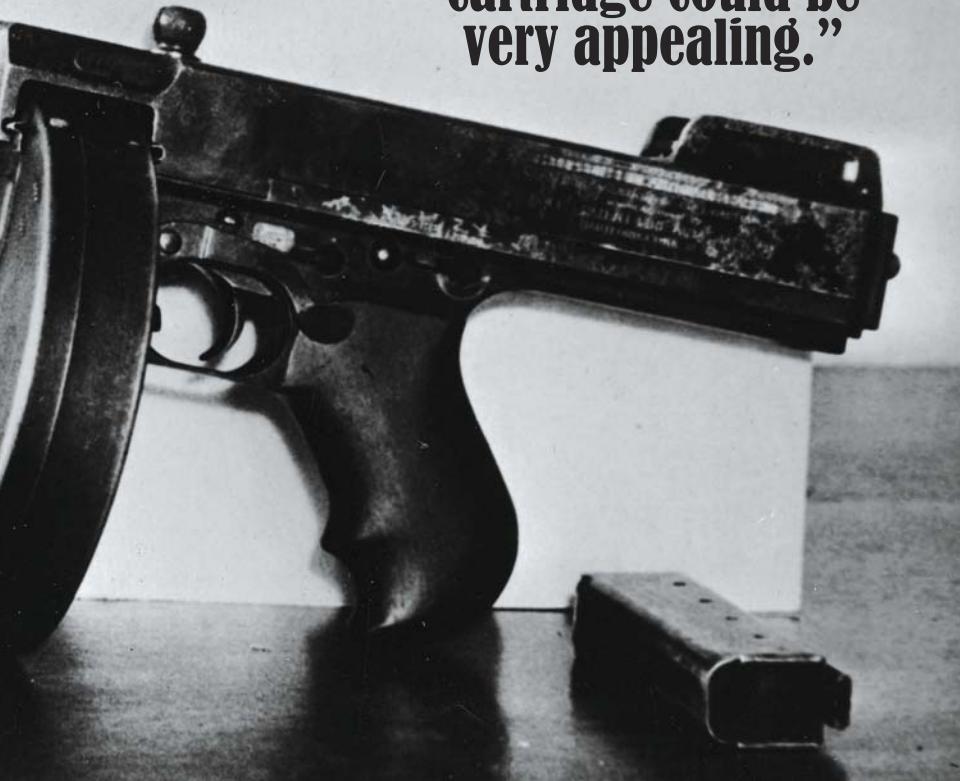
Of course having compatible ammo for your rifle and handgun was a very popular notion in the 19th century, when those on both sides of the law often carried Colt revolvers and Winchester rifles in .44-40.

But in the age of bootleggers, bank robbers—and police task forces out to stop them—having such a matched pair achieved its greatest success. The most deadly combination was the Thompson submachine gun and a matching caliber pistol, namely M1911 in .45 ACP. The .45 automatic is the most reliable pistol of all time and the Thompson is the most rugged submachine gun ever made.



The 1911 had proven itself in World War I, so many adopted it for civilian use during the 1920s and '30s. (Rock Island Auction Company photo)

**“For a gangster on the run, the idea of a shoulder arm and a pistol firing the same cartridge could be very appealing.”**



The 1911A1, so designated in 1926, featured changes such as an arched mainspring housing and scalloped cut-outs behind the trigger guard. (Rock Island Auction Company photo)

#### A MORE POWERFUL THOMPSON

In 1923, a heavy version came out chambered for the .45 Remington Thompson cartridge. This was a powerhouse that launched a 250-grain .45 slug at 1,450 fps from its 14-inch barrel. This model introduced the horizontal fore grip and had a bayonet (which added weight for controllability in full auto fire) and a more straight line configuration stock as well as an optional bipod.

This .45 caliber assault rifle was just too far ahead of its time to be understood by the powers that be and was therefore not adopted. It ranks as one of the first true assault rifles and had a lot to offer. One thing is for sure: Its heavy slug would not have blown up on the jungle foliage of Viet Nam like the M16's 5.56 did and it had the weight and velocity to punch through the green shield to the enemy.

#### THOMPSON SUBMACHINE GUN

General John Talliaferro Thompson, the inventor of the “Tommy gun,” conceived of his gun as a military arm for clearing trenches in World War I.

General Thompson wanted everything made five times heavier than need be so parts would not fail. He even put oil pads in the receiver so the gun would always be running lubricated like an automobile motor. This feature has been very well loved by jungle fighters using the Thompson ever since. It is worth noting that the Thompson was the first gun to be labeled a submachine gun.

Unfortunately, production of the Thompson was too late for use in World War I. So the gun earned an infamous reputation early on as a gangster gun used by rival bootleggers to shoot each other and any innocent bystanders who got in the way.

#### WHY IT WAS EFFECTIVE

The Thompson is a natural pointer with its twin pistol grips set at the same angle as the grip on a Luger pistol. Its exceptionally long length of pull of 15 inches ensures that a shooter is fully extended for the most accurate pointing in the same way that the long length of pull on a Best Quality shotgun stocked to fit you does.



The gangster's overnight bag:  
a Thompson submachine gun  
ready for discreet travel.  
(James D. Julia, Inc. photo)

The compact 32-inch long Thompson with its twin pistol grips is one of the fastest submachine guns on target of all time. That's life and death in a gun battle and one reason for the Thompson's great effectiveness in putting its bullets on target before anyone else.

These pointing qualities plus its 10½- pound empty weight combine to make the Thompson the steadiest off hand firing weapon ever made. Semi-auto fire from this gun fired off hand will put more rounds on target than any other shoulder fired weapon. Some people will say the open bolt firing will prevent the best accuracy but that has not been my experience.

The effectiveness of semi-auto fire from a Thompson caused the Auto Ordnance Company to market a semi-auto only version called the Model 1927. Most people didn't want to give up the controllable full auto fire and most of these were converted back to selective fire by their owners. Because the conversion was effected by a mere substitu-



The Thompson submachine gun was more often used with 20-round stick magazines. (James D. Julia, Inc. photo)



tion of parts to existing selective fire weapons, this was easily done.

A 230-grain .45ACP round fired from the 12-inch barrel of a Cutts Compensator-equipped Thompson is moving at 935 fps. The extra barrel length just extracts even more accuracy out of the .45ACP, a round already famous for its accuracy.

The American army stated in World War II that the .45ACP has more stopping power than the 30-06, a fact the .45 has demonstrated over and over. Now when those rounds are hitting at a rate of 600 rounds per minute, it gives new and dramatic meaning to the words "blow them away."

Controllability in full auto fire is where submachine guns excel, but at 850 to 900 rounds per minute the original M1921 fired too fast for the best results. A M1921 without a Cutts Compensator climbs just like an Ingram

M10 with a suppressor on. That's not very good.

When the Marines ordered some for duty in Nicaragua they specified that the cyclic rate be dropped to 600 rounds per minute. They also ordered them with the famous Cutts Compensator muzzle brake which is such a big part of the classic Thompson SMG's look.

The new gun was a honey to shoot. Left to its own, it will arc up and to the right but apply a little pressure and it seems to want to put its bullets just where you want them. It is extremely controllable in full auto fire. It is also more fun to shoot than the law will allow. Literally.

In the 1920s, the Thompson was fed from a 20-round box magazine or a 50-round drum that weighed 5 pounds loaded. These were effective and well liked. There was also a 10-pound loaded weight 100-round drum, but that was just too big and heavy to be practical.

## DID YOU KNOW?

**The Thompson was the first gun to be labeled a submachine gun**



Sometimes a 50-round drum magazine was used with the Thompson submachine gun.  
(James D. Julia, Inc. photo)



The 30-shot box magazine was a World War II development.

#### **MILITARY TRIES THE THOMPSON**

The Thompson eventually gained fame as a military arm as well. The Marines began using it in Nicaragua in

the late 1920s and soon found what a perfect jungle-fighting weapon it was. It was a favorite among U.S. troops in World War II.

The M1928 Thompson is an exceptionally reliable weapon and I have never heard of one jamming in combat. Anytime I hear someone say he had a Thompson in combat and it jammed I

ask, "Did it cock on the top of the receiver (M1928) or the side of the receiver (WW2 M1 and M1A1)?" The answer is always the same: "It cocked on the side of the receiver."

#### **THE M1911 PISTOL**

A shoulder fired weapon needs a

**“The .45 automatic is the most reliable pistol of all time and the Thompson is the most rugged submachine gun ever made.”**



Actor Bruce Willis put a pair of 1911 pistols to good use in the 1996 film, "Last Man Standing," set during the gangster era. (Movie Stills Database photo)

pistol for a companion piece because you can't walk around carrying a shoulder arm ready for action at all times. You can't do any of the chores life demands without laying it down. A pistol can stay on your hip ready for instant action no matter what you are doing.

The M1911 .45 automatic fires the

#### LAWMEN AND GANGSTERS

The Thompson was marketed as an effective weapon against crime. One early poster for it showed a cowboy mowing down a group of bandits on horseback that were attacking his ranch house. Its use against the automobile mounted criminals of the day was highly touted.

One commentator said that the first time a Thompson equipped police officer encounters a group of yeggs ready to engage in the customary running gun battle, the result will be the worst shot up batch of crooks ever to be delivered to the coroner.

The Thompson proved devastatingly effective as a law enforcement tool and perhaps even more of an anti-crime weapon when it fell into gangsters' hands. It was the public outrage against every use of machine guns by criminals that led to the necessary heat being put on them to effect their capture or demise.

Between the machine gun spraying of Al Capone's furniture store with its innocent shoppers diving for cover to Capone's infamous Saint Valentine's Day Massacre of Bugs Moran's gang members, public opinion changed from viewing Capone as a source of liquor during Prohibition to a public menace that had to be removed. It was the idea of submachine guns spraying lead in public places that put the heat on and led to Capone's eventual arrest for tax evasion.

It didn't seem to matter if it was Dillinger, Ma Barker and her boys, Machine-gun Kelly, Bonnie and Clyde, or some of the lesser known gangs. Using a machine gun left the public feeling threatened by stray bullets.

America had just been through World War I, "The Machine Gun War," and had no illusions about how dangerous a steady stream of bullets could be to anything standing in the way.



The famous Thompson submachine gun logo. (James D. Julia, Inc. photo)

same .45ACP cartridge as the Thompson and proved a winning combination from the 1920s to the present day. It was during the 1920s that the M1911 made the transition to the M1911A1 that we use today.

This pistol had already proven itself the most reliable pistol in the world in the Great War and was familiar to most returning soldiers. Its popularity among civilian users was now seeing a steady rise. It saw use by civilians, police, and gangsters all through the 1920s. As weapons stolen from National Guard armories were a standard source

of guns for criminals, it saw a lot more criminal use than it otherwise would have. This is also true for the B.A.R., which was also often taken by thieves.

Then as now, having to carry only one cartridge for both the pistol and shoulder arm makes life simpler and easier. Having the best two guns ever made for that cartridge made life a lot more perfect.

*Jim Dickson has written for the gun magazines in 12 countries for nearly 30 years. GNSL*

# TALE OF THE

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JAMES D. JULIA, INC.



The Thompson submachine gun is one of the most recognizable firearms in the world.

**G**eneral John Talliaferro Thompson's submachine gun was produced too late for World War I, earned a reputation as a gangster gun in the 1920s and 1930s and was a highly acclaimed gun in World War II.

Thompson's "Annihilator" is one of the world's most recognizable weapons.

## Manufacturers

General Thompson's Auto-Ordnance was the original manufacturer, but during World War II the Tommy gun was also made by Colt and Savage in the U.S. and B.S.A. in Great Britain.

## THOMPSON MODELS

**M1921** – The original Thompson had a cyclic rate of 800-1200 rpm. The later M1921AC included the Cutts Compensator on the barrel.

**M1923** – This version fired the more powerful .45 Remington-Thompson cartridge with its heavier 250-grain bullet at about 1440 fps out of its longer 14-inch barrel. It also could be fitted with a bipod and a bayonet.

**M1927** – This short-lived semi-auto version was not very popular.

**M1928** – rate of fire reduced to about 700 rpm to make it more controllable. The M1928A1 (Navy Model) standardized the horizontal foregrip and a means of attaching a sling. These had the Cutts compensator of the earlier 1921AC.

**M1** – These simplified military guns with a 600 rpm rate of fire were considerably less expensive and time-consuming to produce. The Cutts compensator was eliminated. A simple blowback action replaced the Blish locking system. The charging handle was moved to the side and the flip-up ad-

justable rear sight of the earlier guns was changed to a fixed sight. These guns abandoned the drum magazines and used 20-round and newer 30-round magazines.

**M1A1** – This model further simplified the gun by eliminating the floating firing pin in favor of a solid firing pin on the bolt face.

## INITIAL PRICE

The Thompson submachine gun first sold in 1921 for \$200, an extremely high price for the times. By comparison, a new Ford automobile cost \$400.

## MAGAZINES

The Type C 100-round drum proved too heavy and was replaced by the Type L 50-round drum. In World War II, the U.S. military switched to 20- and 30-round stick (box) magazines exclusively as the drum magazines were too heavy, hard to reload and rattled.

# TOMMY GUN



## THOMPSONS AT THE POST OFFICE?

The U.S. Post Office Department ordered several hundred M1921 tommy guns to combat a rash of mail-car robberies and a few police agencies followed suit.

## COLLECTIBLE THOMPSONS

All Thompson submachine guns are collectible these days. When some existing Model 1921 guns were converted for the military to the Model 1928A1 specs, the "1" in "1921" on the gun was overstamped with the number "8," making the model to appear as "Model of 192B." These guns, known as the "Navy Overstamps" are particularly collectible.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The Thompson submachine gun was called by a variety of names such as, "Annihilator," "Trench Broom," "Tommy

Gun," "Squirtgun," "Chopper," "Chicago Typewriter," "Chicago Organ Grinder," and "Piano."

## WHO USED THE TOMMY GUN?

The Thompson submachine gun rose to fame when it was used by bootleggers in the 1920's against each other and against police. The most famous Tommy gun incident was the St. Valentine's Day Massacre in Chicago in 1928, orchestrated by Al Capone.

Such noted criminals of the Depression-era as John Dillinger, "Pretty Boy" Floyd, Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker, "Ma" Barker, and "Babyface" Nelson also used the Tommy gun. Later, the FBI and other law enforcement agencies purchased some Thompsons to increase their firepower capabilities. **GNSL**

## THOMPSON

### SPECIFICATIONS

**Caliber:** 45 ACP pistol cartridge

**Action:** Fully-automatic Blish delayed blowback

**Weight:** 10.8 lbs (M1928)

**Length:** 33.5 inches

**Barrel:** 10.5 inches, 12 inches with Cutts compensator

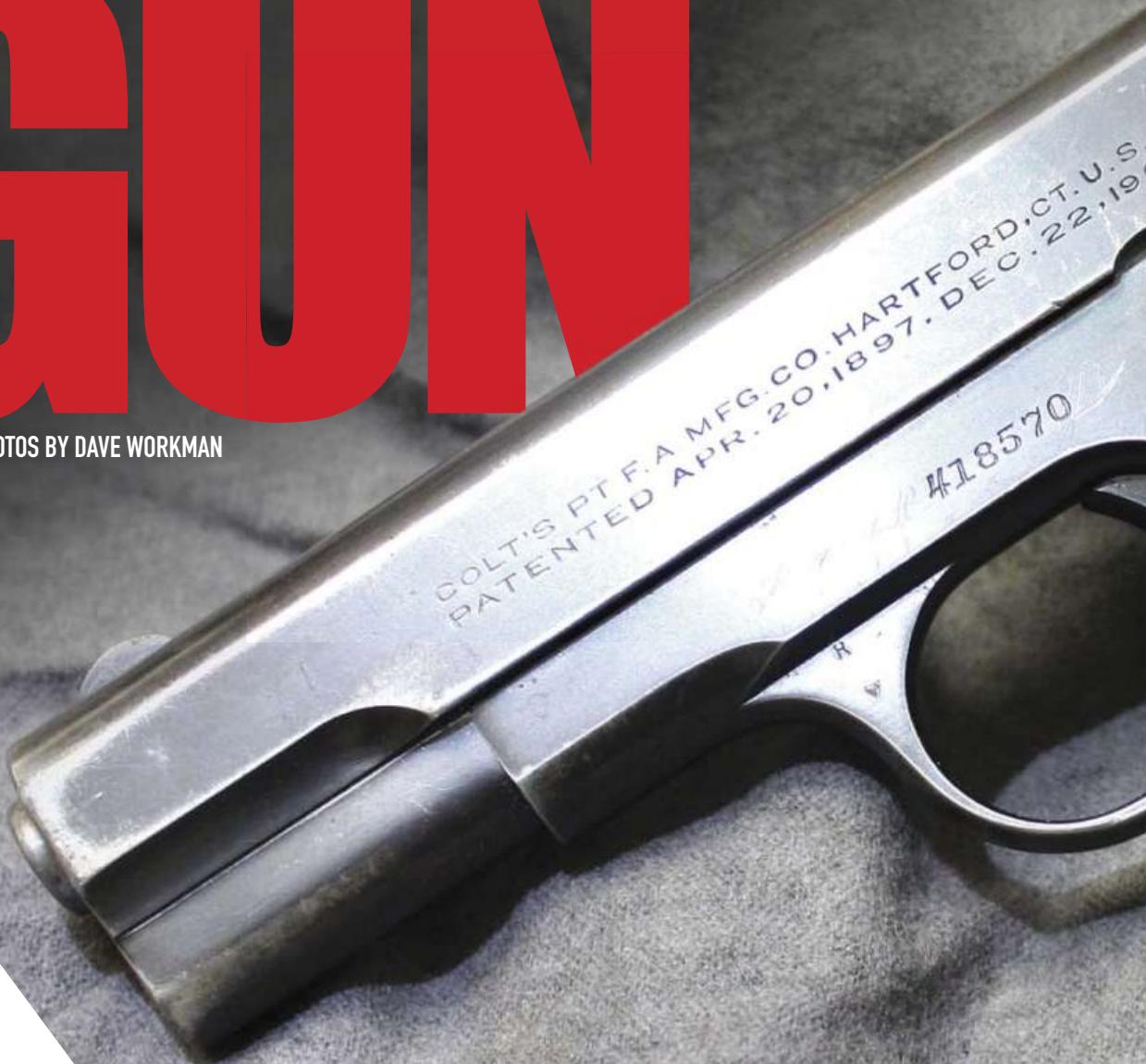
**Feed System:** 20- and 30-round stick (box) magazines, 50- and 100-round drum magazines.

**Number Built:** approximately 2,700,000

**In Production:** 1921-present

# The Dillinger **GUN**

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY DAVE WORKMAN



**THE COLT 1908  
POCKET HAMMERLESS  
WAS CARRIED BY  
CRIMINALS, LAWMEN,  
GENERALS AND MOVIE  
TOUGH GUYS**



**C**HICAGO, July 22, 1934—Acting on a tip from a female informant, G-Men tonight closed in on fugitive bank robber John Dillinger outside of the Biograph movie theater and shot him dead in a nearby alleyway. In his pocket was a Colt Pocket Hammerless .380 automatic.

Dillinger was no average outlaw, which is why his demise made headlines, like in this fictionalized report of his takedown. Despite some public appeal, he was a ruthless criminal who used all kinds of guns in his career and he didn't rob from the rich to give to the poor. He just robbed. He would probably have used the pistol in his pocket that night outside the theater, if only he could have gotten it out of his pocket before federal agents blasted him into eternity.

We'll never know how a guy with Dillinger's firearms experience managed to get stuck trying to draw such a draw-able pistol from a trouser pocket, but the good guys won and only two female bystanders were wounded. Had the criminal been able to unleash a string of shots, no telling what the casualty count might have been.

With Dillinger out of the way, let's look at the pistol.



## ICONIC PISTOL

When the then-Colt Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company began manufacturing its so-called "Pocket Hammerless" Model 1903 semi-auto pistol in .32 ACP, and five years later the Model 1908 in .380 ACP, it is highly unlikely that anybody in Colt's Hartford, Connecticut, factory or corporate offices ever imagined that this flat, concealable and very reliable compact handgun would ever achieve the status of icon, much less legend.

Yet more than a century later, this pistol in its two model/caliber variations is, to paraphrase movie tough guy Humphrey Bogart, "the stuff that dreams are made of." Indeed, one time I asked a retired gunsmith pal if he might have a line on a 1908 that I could purchase, and his first remark was, "Ah, Bogey's gun."

After all, this was the pistol Bogart carried in "Casablanca," and used to dispatch Nazi villain Major Heinrich Strasser, played to the hilt by Conrad Veidt. He also used one against bad guy Edward G. Robinson in "Key Largo," and a third time in "The Desperate Hours." I read somewhere that they worked well with movie blanks.



Even a Model 1903 in this condition can fetch a decent price, especially if there is some documented history to go along with the gun.



One problem with the Colt is that it has a European-style magazine release at the bottom rear of the butt. These are clumsy and will greatly slow down reloading.

It was also the gun George C. Scott, in his Academy Award-winning portrayal of Gen. George S. Patton, used to shoot at a strafing German plane after he had jumped off a balcony, onto a truck and finally onto the dusty street in front of his North African headquarters in an early scene of the film "Patton." And the real-life "Blood-And-Guts" is known to have carried one

on occasion, with stars on the grip panels, and I saw a film clip of him riding in a triumphant parade after the war, with that pistol holstered on his side.

Both the Models 1903 and 1908 were issued to general officers for some 30 years, into the 1970s. Some 570,000 of these handguns were manufactured from 1903 through the mid-1940s, and today the decent specimens fetch some handsome prices

#### **"HAMMERLESS" NOT REALLY HAMMERLESS**

On the plus side, the Colt 1903/1908 Pocket Hammerless is a single-action pistol, not a striker-fired semi-auto at all.

There really is a hammer in this "hammerless" model, but it is concealed inside the rear of the slide and frame, resulting in a trigger pull that is delightful for anybody who has grown rather weary of long-stroke, striker-fired handguns.

at gun shows or auctions. Even some of the beaters are valuable if they have histories to go along with them, and one of the originals in the original cardboard box, with the original finish would easily be worth a figure with three zeros behind it.

Famed Texas Ranger Frank Hamer—the man who led the team that took down famous Depression-era outlaws Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow—also carried one, according to several accounts.

Parker also is reported to have smuggled one to Barrow in jail, taped to her thigh. I've also seen one undocumented report that gangster Al Capone carried one, and other crime figures owned them as well.

Like it or not, handguns are used by good guys and bad guys, reminding us all, as Alan Ladd said to Jean Arthur in the classic Western "Shane," "A gun is a tool...no better or worse than the man using it." Incidentally, Ladd carried one of the small Colts in "This Gun For Hire," opposite the petite (and stunningly attractive) Veronica Lake.

### THIN AND CONCEALABLE

So, what made this pistol so popular with real life good guys and bad guys, and movie tough guys? The two calibers, .32 ACP and .380 ACP, were rather anemic little rounds in the early days. But they still hurt at close range, which was no doubt the intended purpose of this John Moses Browning design.

Primarily, as noted earlier, they were concealable. Slightly over an inch wide across the grips, either pistol tucks so well into a pocket or concealment holster that they simply vanish under even the lightest of cover garments.

### FEATURES AND VARIATIONS

They have a grip safety and a left-side thumb safety, the latter being rather smooth to operate, but maybe a bit awkward for someone with a big thumb because it's kind of small.



1



2



3

**1.** John Browning designed this little semi-auto with a small, but reliable thumb safety. Notice the trademark Rampant Colt etched into the rear of the slide, and the equally marginal rear sight. **2.** Colt's name for this pistol was a bit misleading. The Pocket Hammerless actually does have a hammer, concealed in the rear of the frame. **3.** Frontal view of a 1908 in .380 ACP and a 1903 in slightly smaller .32 ACP. Notice the fixed barrel bushings on both models.

### TAKEDOWN IS SIMPLE

For cleaning purposes, the 1903/08 is one of the easiest semi-auto pistols to strip down that one could ask for, and certainly no more of a challenge than a more modern design.

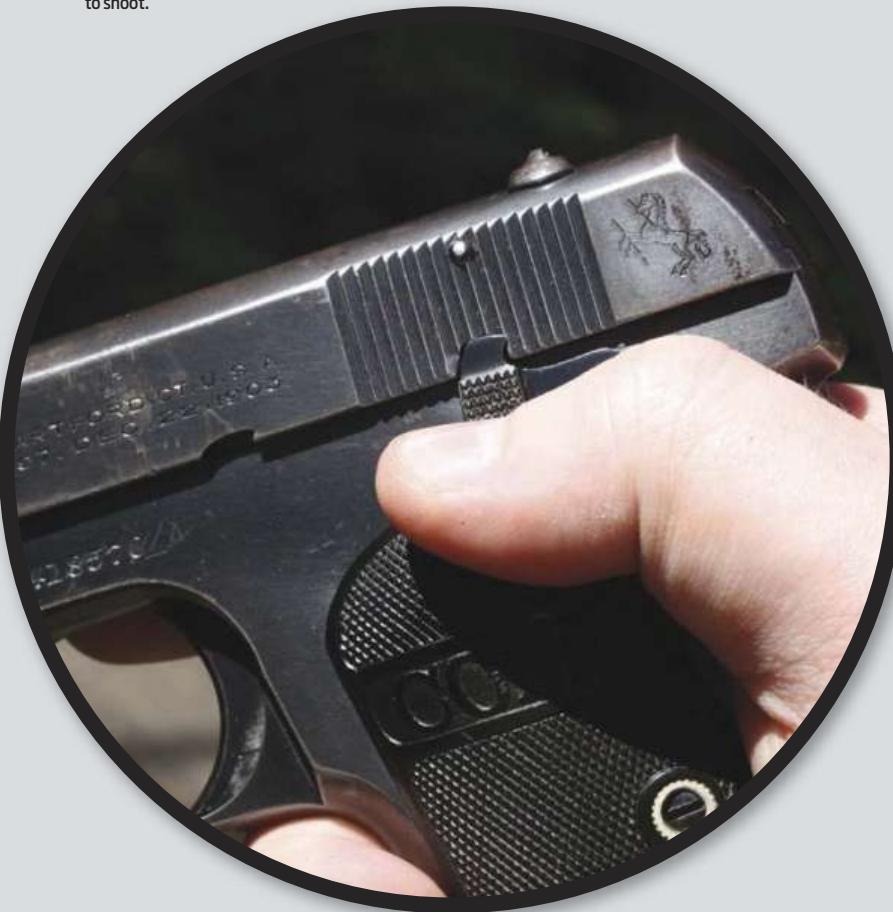
Remove the magazine and make sure the chamber is clear. Then, by lining up a little arrow on the right side of the lower front slide with the front edge of the frame, you twist the barrel counter-clockwise to clear the locking lugs, and then slide the barrel and slide forward and off the frame.

The recoil spring guide fits back into a cavity in the frame below the barrel lug grooves, but thanks to modern aerosol cleaners, any residue from shooting can be easily cleaned out with a few shots of cleaner and maybe a probe with a cotton swab.

Likewise, an aerosol is invaluable when cleaning around the hammer. When co-worker Phil Watson brought his grandfather's vintage model for my inspection, it needed a good bath. Hoppe's No. 9 or Outer's Nitro Powder solvent will work wonders on years of crud, and followed up by a blast of oil, they'll work—if not look—like brand new. Reassembly is just as quick, by reversing the takedown motions.



The Model 1903 fits easily into the palm of a hand, and it is very comfortable to shoot.



The safety is easy to use for nearly everyone, though it might be a little awkward for those with large hands and thumbs.

**“In all, this was a very well-designed handgun for personal protection and emergencies.”**

#### MAKING A COMEBACK

There is more good news. At the National Rifle Association convention in April 2015, it was revealed that a special run of Model 1903 pistols would soon be appearing.

They will be built to the same specs as the originals and will be available with a matte finish that looks like Parkerizing. There will be some guns available in deep blue or nickel, too, but expect to pay a premium. Later, there may also be a .380-caliber version available.



A special run of new Model 1903 pistols was announced at the NRA convention in 2015, and they're rather handsome specimens with checkered wood grip panels.

Standard grips were hard rubber, but one could also have checkered wood panels installed. I've seen nickel-plated specimens with mother-of-pearl grips, but they always seemed rather gaudy and they don't make a pistol shoot any straighter.

Built on the same frame, both models had what one might consider rather horrid sights by today's standards. However, used at close range as intended, they don't do too badly. A while back, a friend and I unleashed a 1903 that belonged to his grandfather and at 50 yards we discovered, upon adjusting for windage and elevation, that we could punch holes in a target.

Both versions weigh right around 24 ounces empty, according to historical data. The .32-caliber holds eight rounds in the magazine, while the .380 version carries seven. Now for the downside:

The magazine release is a European-style latch at the rear of the butt, and it can be a pain in the butt to swap magazines out with any speed.

There were five basic variations of these popular pistols. The Model 1903 had a 4-inch barrel and separate barrel bushing, while the Model 1908 had a separate bushing on a 3.75-inch barrel for the first couple of years.

In 1910, the "Type III" featured an integrated bushing, which became standard on subsequent versions, all with 3.75-inch barrels. There was also a run of Model 1903 pistols with a military Parkerized finish that ended the production at more than 572,000.

#### RELIABLE, TOO

Another bit of good news is that this pistol, though designed for yesterday's ball ammunition, will feed some

#### WHO CARRIED ONE?

**1 John Dillinger**  
In his own "war"

**2 Humphrey Bogart**  
In the movies

**3 George Patton**  
In a war

**4 Frank Hamer**  
In a war against crime

modern JHPs reliably. The caveat is that some of today's ammunition has more stout recoil and you wouldn't want to give a vintage pistol with yesterday's metallurgy a steady diet of this stuff.

In all, a very well-designed handgun for personal protection and emergencies. Frankly, the Model 1903 and 1908 are handguns that could easily become popular all over again. One can always hope that a planned special run of these pistols will develop into a steady production, but I'm certainly not going to hold my breath. Shooting the Colt Pocket Hammerless can take that breath away!

*Dave Workman is an award-winning writer and certified firearms instructor who has been writing about firearms and other outdoor topics for nearly four decades. GNSL*



The stamping on the slide says it all: Colt Automatic, Calibre .32 Rimless Smokeless.



With the slide drawn back, notice how far the barrel extends and the fixed bushing.



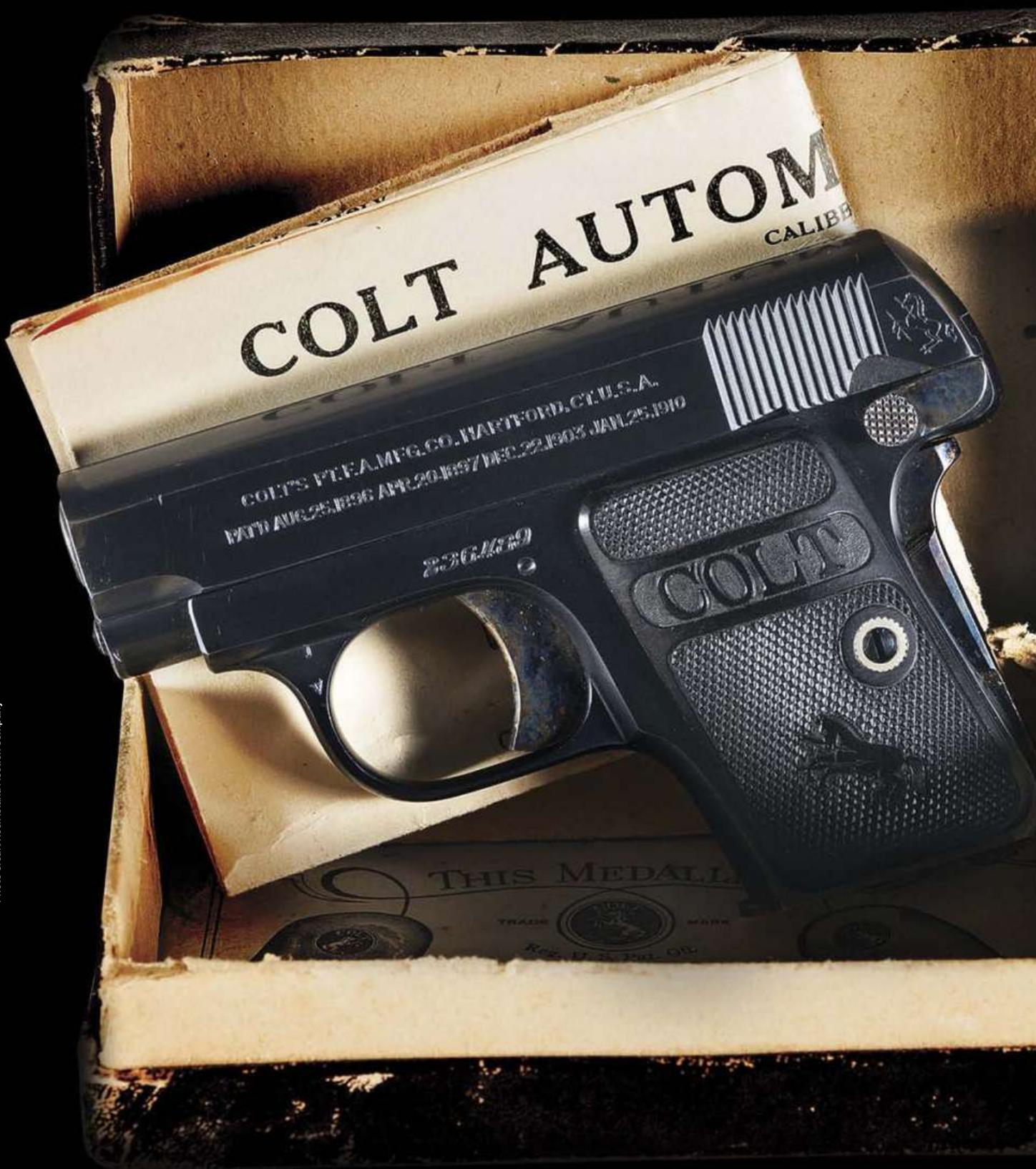
A good way for collectors to spot "parts" guns is to look on the inside rear of the slide, where the serial number is stamped. If these numbers don't coincide with numbers on the frame, you've got a pistol put together from parts.

**“...this pistol... is, to paraphrase movie tough guy Humphrey Bogart, ‘the stuff that dreams are made of.’”**

#### MAKING A COMEBACK

There is more good news. At the National Rifle Association convention in April 2015, it was revealed that a special run of Model 1903 pistols would soon be appearing.

They will be built to the same specs as the originals and will be available with a matte finish that looks like Parkerizing. There will be some guns available in deep blue or nickel, too, but expect to pay a premium. Later, there may also be a .380-caliber version available.



The Colt Vest Pocket pistol was the choice of those who wanted to carry a semi-auto, but wanted something smaller than Colt's full-size 1911 or mid-sized .380 Pocket Hammerless.

# POCKET-SIZED PROTECTION

BY WALDT STRATTEN

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROCK ISLAND AUCTION COMPANY

## ***COLT'S VEST POCKET AUTOS: SECURITY IN A CONCEALABLE PACKAGE***

**B**eginning at the turn of the last century, demand began to rise for personal firearms that were more easily concealed and less obtrusive. Guns at the time were seen as tools, and more people required firearms that they could carry without interrupting their daily lives.

Firearms manufacturers responded by creating more compact guns in small calibers. Though these guns were not very powerful, they fit easily in coat pockets, handbags and undergarments.

Even though these guns were intended as personal or "last-ditch" firearms, the relatively weak cartridges they fired limited their lethality. Their real value was in the sense of security they gave their owners. The Colt Vest Pocket pistol is one of the best-known examples of this type of weaponry.

And these were a favorite of different facets of society, including law enforcement and gangsters during the 1920s and 1930s.



An example of a factory-engraved Vest Pocket model.

### A BROWNING DESIGN

The Colt 1908 Vest Pocket is a compact, semi-automatic, hammerless, striker-fired pistol. It was designed to carry a total of seven .25 ACP (6.35 mm) cartridges. The pistol and cartridge were designed by John Moses Browning and first became popular in Europe as the Model 1905 manufactured by Fabrique Nationale (FN).

It has a prominent thumb safety along the left leading edge of the grip and is swept downwards to fire. It also featured a grip safety similar to that of the Colt 1911 and Colt 1908 Pocket Hammerless, both also Browning designs.

The design was licensed to Colt in 1908, and it remained in production for the next 40 years, during which time more than 409,000 were built, even though the highest serial number is 420,705. Colt and FN had agreed that FN would not produce any 1905s for export to the U.S., and so Colt had the domestic market all to itself.

In 1908, its first year in production, only 850 guns were made. This changed dramatically in the next year, which saw more than 22,000 produced. The peak years were 1919 and 1920; more than 43,000 were produced each of those years. It maintained moderate levels of production until 1932, when things began to drop off. In its final year, 1948, only one Colt 1908 Vest Pocket pistol was produced.

### USE AS A BACKUP GUN

The 1908 became a favorite of law enforcement, finding use as a backup gun for police officers, detectives and

other plainclothes officials. Its popularity was greatest in the 1920s and 30s, and it offered the size based advantages of a small caliber .32 S&W revolver but with the safety, capacity, and speed of an automatic.

It was favored by all walks of society and was favored by both mobsters and the people trying to put them behind bars, as well as average people who valued their own personal protection.

It was one of the first hammerless weapons light enough to comfortably carry. It was remarkably accurate at ranges up to 10 yards in spite of a short barrel and rudimentary sights. Its only shortcoming was a safety that blocked the trigger but not the striker.

Though the .25 ACP is a fairly weak cartridge, it held up well against other guns of comparable size (the .32S&W revolver and .22 pistols).

Originally, the gun was basically a scaled-down version of the Model 1903 Pocket Hammer, complete with hammer and a newly designed manual safety lever. However, the prototype was thought to be too complicated for its size, so a second prototype that was mechanically identical to the FN 1906 was created, with the addition of the manual safety.

It first appeared in Colt's catalog of 1909 as the "Colt Automatic Pistol, Pocket Model, Calibre .25, Hammerless," but had the designation of Model N inside the company.

### COLT 1908 VEST POCKET PISTOL SPECIFICATIONS

**Manufactured:** 1908 to 1948 with approximately 409,000 pistols made  
**Caliber:** .25 ACP  
**Operation:** Striker-fired blowback design  
**Capacity:** Six-round magazine  
**Barrel:** 2 inches  
**Weight:** 12 ounces  
**Other features:** Grip safety, magazine safety (1917 and after) and thumb slide-lock safety



#### VARIATIONS OF THE PISTOL

The Colt Model 1908 Vest Pocket was available in blued and polished nickel finishes, as well as silver and gold plate and various engraved versions. There were also several major variants of grips: The earliest were hard rubber and checkered, while the 1920s saw the introduction of checkered wood, and pearl and ivory were available by special order. There were also many variations of the pocket pistol during its production. One of the best known is the Renaissance model, which has a gold-plated trigger and optional engraving and plating.



**“It was favored by both mobsters and the people trying to put them behind bars ...”**

Three Colt Pocket Vest models in .25 ACP below their big brother, a Colt 1903 Pocket Hammerless in .32 ACP.

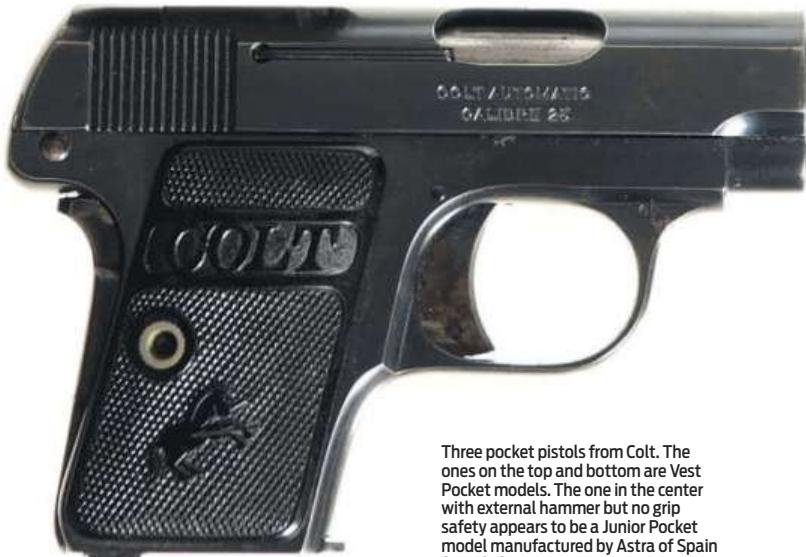
The gun remained largely unchanged until 1916, when it was modified with the addition of a magazine safety. By this point, roughly 141,000 had been produced. The magazine safety disconnector prevented accidental firing with the magazine removed and was patented by Colt in 1917. Colt would include a green brochure with every 1908 for a year after its introduction to highlight the inclusion of this new safety feature.

Dieudonné Saive of FN used the European version of this pistol (the old FN Model 1905) as the basis for the Baby Browning, which entered production in 1931. It competed directly with the Colt 1908 and is at least partially responsible for the steep drop-off in production numbers beginning in 1932.

The Baby Browning was very similar to the 1908 in almost every respect, but it was slightly smaller and lighter—weighing only 9.7 ounces to the 1908's 12—and eliminated the grip safety, which many customers disliked. The BB spelled the end for both the 1908 Pocket Pistol and the Remington Derringer, also widely known as a palm pistol (the derringers were renowned for their size, but usually held only one to two shots). It was meant to contend with the successful German subcompacts being manufactured at the time.

#### A POPULAR DESIGN

Even though the Colt 1908 Vest Pocket pistol began to decline in the 1930s, from the date it was first produced until the beginning of World War II it was Colt's fifth most popular model. Because of its small size and caliber,



Three pocket pistols from Colt. The ones on the top and bottom are Vest Pocket models. The one in the center with external hammer but no grip safety appears to be a Junior Pocket model manufactured by Astra of Spain for Colt from 1958 to 1968.

there is a fairly high survival rate of 1908s in very good condition. They are very highly prized by some collectors, and the gun itself was made in a large number of varieties over the course of its production run.

The 1908, as well as the FN 1905 that it was directly copied from, had a tremendous impact on small, easy-to-carry firearms over the course of the 20th century. Its successor, the Baby Browning, is still in production today.

*Stratten Waldt is a freelance writer and army officer from Durham, North Carolina. He joined the Corps of Engineers after completing ROTC in 2013.*

GNSL

**“The 1908 became a favorite of law enforcement, finding use as a backup gun for police officers, detectives and other plain-clothes officials.”**

#### A SPECIAL 1908 PISTOL

The 1908 was also very popular as a gift. One special example was made for Val Browning, the only son of the original inventor. It was set in a satin- and velvet-lined case and was made in 1926, the year Val cared for his father on his deathbed in the FN manufacturing plant. It was embellished with gold inlaid floral pattern and carries the initials “VAB”.



Another example of a nicely engraved pistol.

#### THE DIMINUTIVE .25 ACP

The .25 ACP is a 6.35 mm centerfire pistol cartridge originally designed and introduced in 1905 by John Browning. It was designed for early blowback pistols that lacked a breech locking mechanism. It was designed to mimic the effects of performance of a .22 Long Rifle cartridge, but was meant to be fired from a 2-inch barrel. It was designed for more reliable feeding in auto-loading pistols. It is the smallest centerfire pistol round in production, and was meant to be used in so-called "pocket pistols."

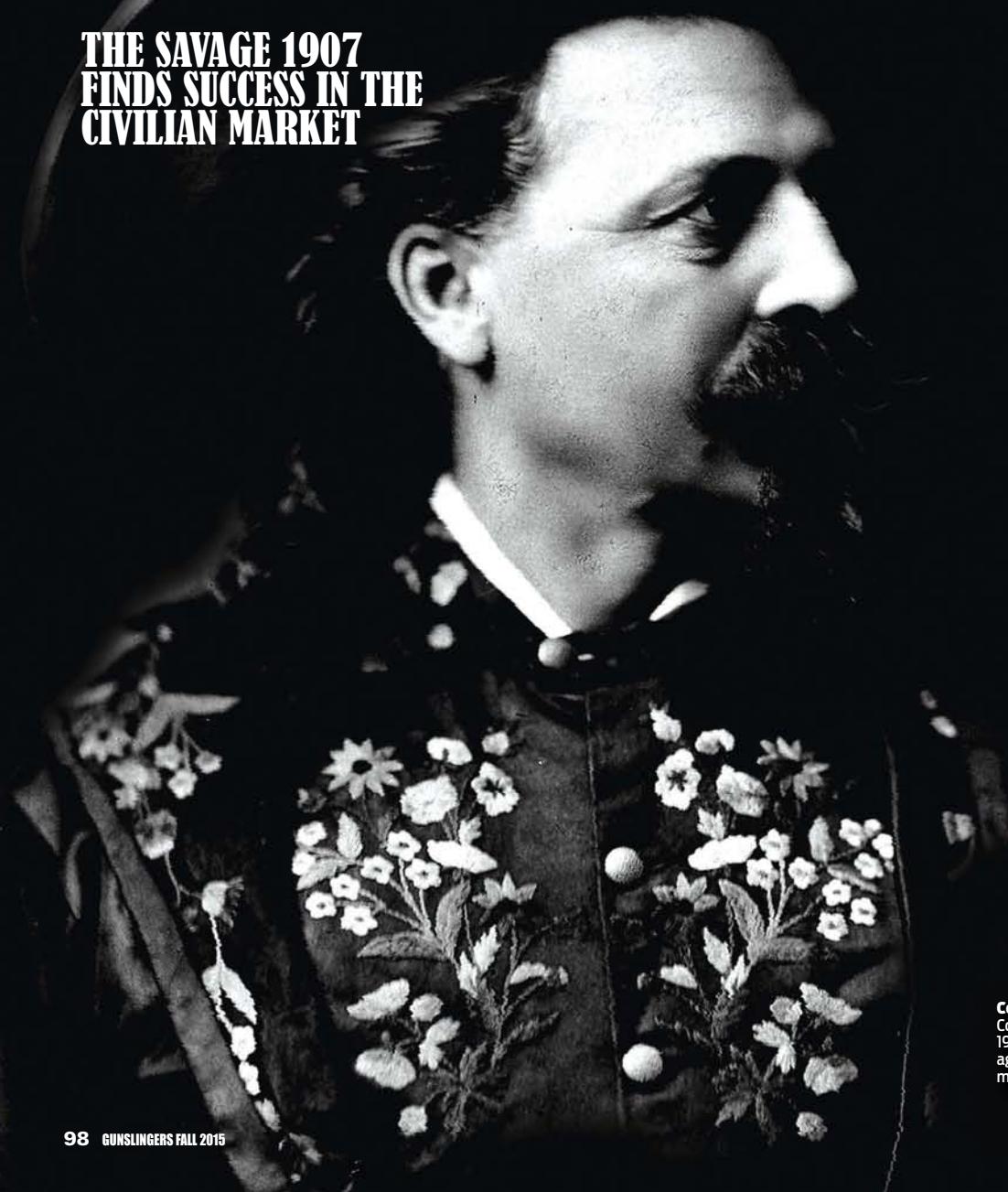


Two Colt Vest Pocket models, the top one with walnut grip panels and the bottom one with hard rubber grips.

# “Ten Shots Quick As *LIGHT*

TEXT BY STRATTEN WALDT / PHOTOS COURTESY OF JAMES D. JULIA, INC. AUCTIONS

THE SAVAGE 1907  
FINDS SUCCESS IN THE  
CIVILIAN MARKET



**Col. William F. “Buffalo Bill”**  
Cody was presented a Model 1907. He endorsed it and Savage made the most of that in marketing the pistol.

# WINCH'



Savage Arms is widely known for their rifles and shotguns, but in 1906 they made forays into the pistol market and attempted to compete directly with the Colt 1911.

At the time, the U.S. military decided that it wanted to replace its current sidearms—usually revolvers lacking in either capacity or knockdown power—with a more up-to-date gun, likely a centerfire pistol.

The government sent out a list of standards and invited all gun manufacturers to compete for the right to produce this new sidearm. Numerous companies, including Smith & Wesson and Luger, submitted entries, but only the Colt 1911 and Savage made it to the final round. At the time, Savage was best known for its Model 1895 and 99 rifles, which were the first hammerless lever-action rifles ever produced.

## FINAL ROUND

Designed by Major Elbert Searle, the original Model 1907 Savage Caliber .45 ACP was a .45 semi-automatic, had only 34 parts, wooden grips, an ambidextrous magazine release, grip safety, loaded chamber indicator, and held eight rounds in the magazine, as opposed to Colt's seven.

Both the 1907 and Colt's 1911 were sent back to the manufacturers for further development several times, but in the end the 1911 won out, largely due to superior durability.

In the trials, to which the public was invited, the first 1,000 rounds were fired by both guns without issue. At the end of the day, however, the Savage's heavy recoil took a toll on the internal parts, and the Colt had fired 6,000 rounds without issue while the Savage had five part breakages and 31 malfunctions.

This made the 1911 a clear choice for the military, but Savage was able to recognize a significant opportunity in the civilian market, which was ripe for a small, easily wielded pistol.

## A SAVAGE FOR CIVILIANS

The Savage Model 1907 that was put into mass production is a semi-auto-

matic pocket pistol, produced in Utica, New York, from 1907 to 1920 in .32 ACP, and from 1913 to 1920 in a .380 model. It was also produced as the Model 1917 from 1920 to 1928, which was nearly identical to the 1907, but had a significantly larger grip.

The 1907 was produced through the bankruptcy of Savage Arms in 1917, when it was reorganized as the Savage Arms Corporation, with some minor differences including a new pattern of slide serrations, a loaded chamber indicator, a long spur on the cocking lever and a matte-black finish.

## 1907 FEATURES

Compared to other "pocket" arms available at the time, the 1907 weighed just 19 ounces and possessed a 3.75-inch barrel. The overall length was just 6.5 inches, and the thickness less than an inch. The detachable magazine held nine to 10 rounds, depending on caliber, and utilized a delayed blowback action.

The barrel had a lug on top of the chamber that matched with a groove on the inside of the slide and another on the bottom that fit into a slot in the frame. Because the bottom lug prevented the barrel from moving to the

rear, the groove in the slide rotated the barrel to the right 5 degrees, ejecting the spent cartridge case.

Though this system worked, it put significant stress on the weapon when used with a higher caliber cartridge, one of the reasons for the original .45's failure in the competition against the 1911.

The Model 1907 had a higher magazine capacity than almost any other pistol of the era because it featured a staggered-column magazine. It was able to hold nine .380 or 10 .32 rounds.

It did not contain flat springs or a single screw; the grips snapped in the place. The original factory grips were made from gutta-percha. It featured a tubular slide, coarse slide serrations, burr-style cocking lever and magazine release in the front of the grip.

It also had a manual safety located on the left side of the frame which was rotated downwards to allow the slide to move.

The gun was available with numerous options for custom engraving, gold or silver inlays, and grips made from exotic woods and ivory.

Before the 1907 and Colt 1911, it was unthinkable that a handgun could be anything other than a revolver. This changed quickly, and it was these first



### DID YOU KNOW?

- Sid Caesar's character, Ezra Desire, uses a Model 1907 in the 1978 film "The Cheap Detective."
- Jude Law's character, Harlan Maquire, uses one in the 2002 drama "The Road to Perdition."
- It also sees use in the hit HBO series "Boardwalk Empire."

This gold-plated Model 1907 in .32 ACP features hand-engraving by Enoch Tue. The grips are solid silver. It sold through a James D. Julia auction in 2012 for \$12,650.



This rare Savage 1907 was one of 200 made in .45 ACP and submitted for the U.S. military trials and was one of the few not rebuilt after the trials for the civilian market. It sold through a James D. Julia auction in 2013 for \$31,625.

#### THE FRENCH 1907

Even though Savage had turned its attention on the civilian market, the French Army found itself lacking sidearms during World War I and contracted Savage to produce pistols for them between 1915 and 1917. More than 40,000 of these special military model 1907s were manufactured, all .32 ACP units. Portugal also ordered 1,200 pistols with the same configuration as those sent to France.

#### SAVAGE 1907 SPECIFICATIONS

**Caliber:**  
.32 ACP, .380 ACP

**Magazine Capacity:**  
10 Rounds (Double Stack)

**Barrel Length:**

3 1/2 inches

**Material:**

Blued Carbon Steel

**Length:**

6 5/8 inches

**Height:**

4 1/4 inches

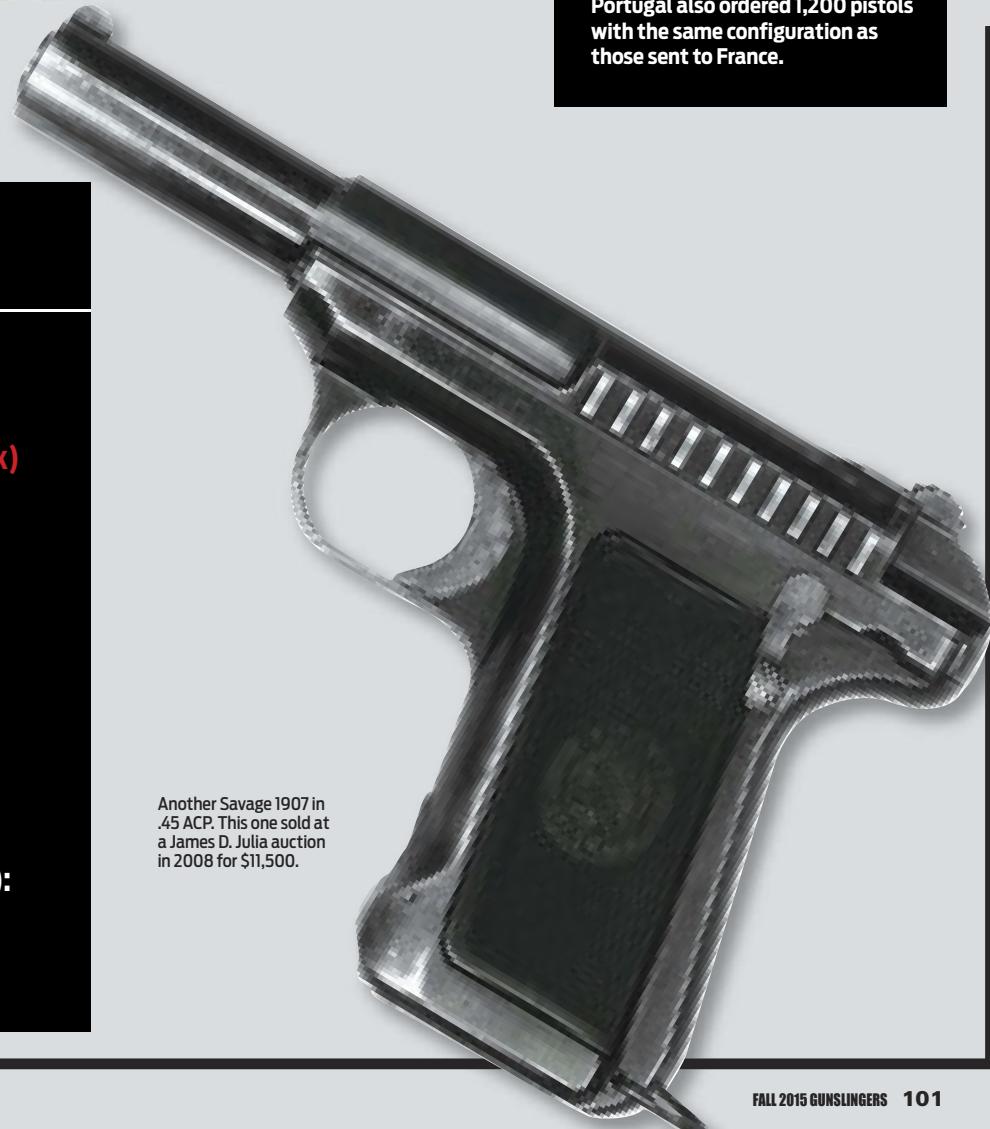
**Thickness:**

1 inch

**Weight (w/empty mag.):**

20 ounces

**Weight (w/full Mag.):**



Another Savage 1907 in .45 ACP. This one sold at a James D. Julia auction in 2008 for \$11,500.



Another Savage 1907 in .45 ACP. This one sold at a James D. Julia auction in 2008 for \$11,500.

two semiautomatics that were responsible for changing the public perception of pistols in the United States.

#### **"TEN SHOTS QUICK AS LIGHTNING!"**

The Savage Model 1907 is also remembered for its catchy advertising campaigns. The company's marketing department immediately attempted to appeal to housewives, businessmen and fans of Wild West heroes. Their slogan "Ten Shots Quick as Lightning" was widely known at the time.

They were able to get endorsements from famous figures including William "Buffalo Bill" Cody and the Pinkerton Detective Agency.

They even had Bat Masterson,

the legendary lawman and buffalo hunter saying, "A tenderfoot with a Savage automatic and the nerve to stand his ground could have run the worst six-shooter man the West ever knew right off the range." Teddy Roosevelt was presented with one, too.

The company also capitalized on the weapon's use on the front lines World War I (along with the Lewis Automatic Machine Gun, which it also manufactured). Many of the campaigns focused on some feature of the design, the matter how big or small. Often this was the locked breach, the 10-shot magazine, or the grip shape that allowed it to "aim as easily as pointing your finger."

The locked breach was one of the things the company most loved to tout, claiming:

**HEAD TO HEAD**  
**Colt 1911 vs. Savage Model 1907** Following are the results from the final round of the battle between Colt and Savage.

**COLT**  
6,000 Rounds  
0 malfunctions

**SAVAGE**  
6,000 Rounds  
5 breaks, 31 malfunctions



#### THE AMMO

The Savage 1907 uses .32 ACP, also known as the Browning 7.65, a centerfire pistol cartridge. Originally designed for use in the FN M1900 semi-automatic pistol, it is a semi-rimmed, straight-walled cartridge. The .32 ACP needed a straight wall for reliable blowback as well as a small rim for reliable feeding. The cartridge is small and light, and the compact pistols that use it are prized for their accuracy relative to larger caliber weapons, making it very popular for concealed carry use.

- It sealed the barrel, keeping unburned powder from falling into the action and causing malfunctions; and

- It produced more velocity and power than other pistols in the same caliber because the breech was locked: "The striking energy is considerably higher and much more uniform."

Though the Savage Model 1907 is not as widely known now as it was in its heyday, it has an important place in the history of American firearms and American pistols. The 1907 was the most popular pocket pistol through the start of World War I, and by the end of its production run in 1928, more than 230,000 1907s and 43,000 1917s had been manufactured.

**“...the Savage Model 1907...has an important place in the history of American firearms...”**

It was in direct competition with one of the best-known pistols of all time, the Colt 1911. The qualities Savage advertised as special for the time (and they were) include things like high capacity, simplicity, balance, compactness, fewer components, ease of use, ergonomics, safety and accuracy.

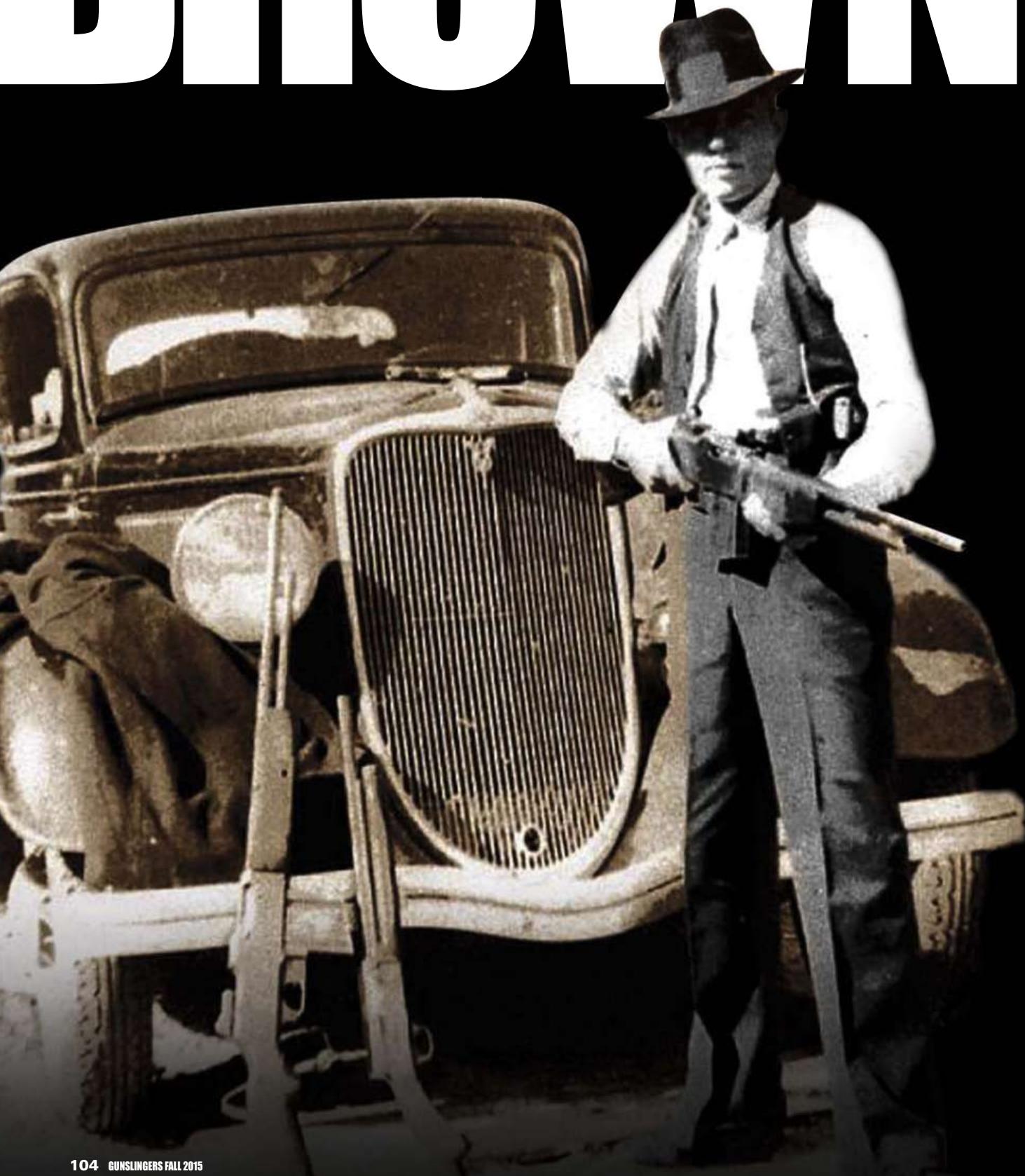
The 1907 and the Colt saw the end of the era of revolvers and forever changed personal firearms in the United States.

*Stratten Waldt is a freelance writer and army officer from Durham, North Carolina. He joined the Corps of Engineers after completing ROTC in 2013. GNSL*



This factory-engraved Model 1907 in 32 ACP with pearl grips was presented to Col. William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody in 1911 and had his name engraved on the backstrap. It's one of the few guns once owned by Buffalo Bill that is not in a museum. It sold through a James D. Julia auction in 2012 for \$66,125.

# BROWN



# ING'S BEAST

BY JIM THOMPSON

## THE POWERFUL B.A.R. OFFERED TREMENDOUS FIREPOWER

**I**t was big, heavy and looked rather like the shotguns John Moses Browning had generated a few years earlier in his brilliant career.

The Browning Automatic Rifle (B.A.R.) is seldom even mentioned in the scripts of major film work. Yet in military service, it was the cornerstone of the original "fire and maneuver" tactical doctrine in which full-caliber automatic weapons suppress enemy movement.

In civilian use, the big rifle offered awesome firepower, especially desirable to the gangsters who were sometimes able to get their hands on either commercial versions or military models stolen from government armories.

The rifle's limited magazine capability restricted its use as a true sustained-fire-support weapon. In fact, the B.A.R.'s occurrence increased several times during World War II—first in the Marine Corps and then Army units—because of the need to use two or more of the rifles to keep up a steady tattoo of supporting, suppressive fire before tripod-mounted machine guns were available.

Many early versions were marked "Browning Machine Rifle." Eventually, longer magazines were produced but saw almost no action, making the rifle's use from the prone position very awkward. Still, as the first modern squad automatic weapon, the B.A.R. changed everything.



James D. Julia, Inc. photo

John Moses Browning himself inspects a Winchester-produced B.A.R. in 1918. (U.S. Army photo)



## GANGSTERS WHO USED THE B.A.R.

1

Lester Joseph Gillis, a.k.a.  
“Baby Face Nelson”

2

Clyde Barrow

### WHY IT WAS EFFECTIVE

Its open bolt and heavy springing caused a fire-opening “lurch” that tended to induce its own flinch. As a result, most authorities estimated that, in military applications, the B.A.R. required much more specialized training than most of its contemporaries.

Obviously, firing as fast as its tripod-mounted, full-power rifle contemporaries, there was recoil to deal with, but Browning set that up brilliantly, too, so that recoil disturbances from firing are felt by most experienced shooters to

be less than far less potent submachine guns.

In .30/06, delivered energy at the muzzle from a B.A.R. is typically about 3,200 foot-pounds. The .45 ACP, by comparison, developed just 350 to 375 foot-pounds. The cartridge, with bullets 147 to 173 grains, even without armor piercing capability, was vastly more efficacious when dealing with vehicles and armor than any pistol or carbine round. It’s that power and penetration that made the relatively large rifle convenient and very deadly.



## THE HISTORY

The first man-portable fully automatic weapons issued to U.S. troopers were the Hotchkiss/Colt Benet-Mercie and the French Chauchat ("Gladiator"), both rather awkward designs with unusual operational problems.

The "Sho-Sho," in particular, was a long recoil design, made from cheap commercial tubing, and tended to require a lot of training and constant field maintenance to work at all. Out of production, the Benet-Mercie used Hotchkiss side-loaded feed strips and was very heavy and clumsy to manipulate in adverse conditions.

## COPS, ROBBERS AND THE B.A.R.

Interestingly, there are many references to both Lester Joseph Gillis, a.k.a. "Baby Face Nelson," and Clyde Barrow using stolen B.A.R.s. This is probably true, but most of the photography that exists and most of the anecdotal evidence shows commercial M1919 and "Colt Monitor" guns.

By far the more intimidating character was "Baby Face," who had apparently taught himself proficiency with a wide variety of weapons, including the B.A.R., Thompson, a .38 ACP Colt modified to shoot full automatic and a variety of rifles.

A sometime-partner of John Dillinger, who was far better known, Nelson had been a career criminal from the time he was about 13, when a possibly accidental shooting and "joyriding" first brought him to serious law enforcement attention. He remained on the wrong side of the law right up until his death Nov. 27, 1934, in Barrington, Illinois.

It may be an apocryphal tale or even misinterpretation, but almost four decades ago, an elderly resident of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, advised me he'd stumbled across a lone man, "almost cherubic looking," shooting a B.A.R. across a span of water at small paper targets tacked to hunks of abandoned picnic tables.

He claimed it "might have been Baby Face." It was only years after the interview that it was established that the killer frequented that area and was known to practice alone, like a professional.

A Colt Monitor was among several weapons deployed in his last, ugly confrontation with law enforcement. So was a submachine gun, which jammed.

How many did he kill? No one is sure.

Browning had the B.A.R. ready long before the replacements for the above duo were "demanded" and demonstrated both the heavy water-cooled gun that became the Model of 1917 and the "Machine Rifle" on Congress Heights (District of Columbia) Feb. 27, 1917, just about seven weeks before U.S. entry into World War I.

Army Ordnance ordered the weapons into production on the spot,

delivering printed contracts within 24 hours and recommended adoption of the heavy gun, too.

The original intention was to use the B.A.R. in "walking fire" to "sweep the enemy away." A steel cup was fitted on the first issue B.A.R. ammunition belts to position the rifle's butt firmly. Trying this even in exercises proved disastrous. The rifles sometimes locked in position, inhibiting the gunner from taking cover



Before the end of the 1920s, tripods and flexible traverse collars were developed here and in Europe, but not used very much. This particular one holds a Model 30 F.N. B.A.R. (1936 F.N. catalog photo)



and of course, the odd "from the hip" posture meant the B.A.R. men were easily identified.

Moreover, the "aim the hose" technique this portended might've been more appropriate to a belted gun. With 20 rounds in the box, using the sights was surely far more efficient.

Later, 30 round magazines were developed but seldom used save for odd anti-aircraft applications. A purpose-built 40-round AA magazine was introduced for U.S. service, but withdrawn from issue and declared obsolete by about 1927.

Most western countries adopted the B.A.R. The French modified the mechanism to take a top-feeding magazine, streamlined barrel change and produced the long-lived FM 24/29 series of light machine guns in their 7.5x54mm.

Even the Japanese, according to George Chinn, adopted an F.N. spin-off of the B.A.R. as the "Model of 1932" in their 7.7x58mm service cartridge.

In the mid to late 1920s, sights were modified to reflect the introduction of 173-grain service ammunition.

#### OTHER VARIATIONS

As used in the interwar period, the

primary B.A.R.s encountered by civilians would've been surplus 1918 guns, many of them stolen or the commercial Model 1919s, an export and civilian rifle, which had its return mechanism installed in the stock rather than the gas tube and bore no flash hider.

Later the Model 1924 rifle was offered for a short period of time, featuring a pistol grip and redesigned hand guard. The Cavalry Model of 1922 shortened the barrel and added a bipod. The M1918A1, featuring a lightweight spiked bipod, with a leg height adjustment feature, attached to the gas cylinder and a hinged steel butt plate, was formally approved on June 24, 1937. The M1918A1 was a modest redesign to increase the weapon's effectiveness and controllability firing in bursts.

An improved version of the Model 1924 commercial, the Model 1925 (R75) would achieve the highest popularity in export sales. It is based on the Model 1924 but uses a heavy, finned barrel, a lightweight bipod, and is equipped with dust covers in the magazine well and ejection port.

The Model 1925 was produced in various calibers, including every single Mauser-based full-power rifle cartridge

and a few others. A minor variant of the Model 1925 (R75) was the R75A light machine gun with a quick-change barrel, produced in 1924 in small quantities for the Dutch military.

Between 1921 and 1928, Fabrique Nationale imported for research and resale more than 800 Colt-manufactured examples of the Colt Machine Rifles for sale abroad. All of the Colt automatic machine rifles were available for export sale. After 1929, the Model 1925 and the Colt Monitor were available for export sale in Colt's exclusive sales territories per its agreement with F.N. By 1930, F.N. was producing its own B.A.R.s, and of course, Poland and Sweden had adopted the rifles quite early on.

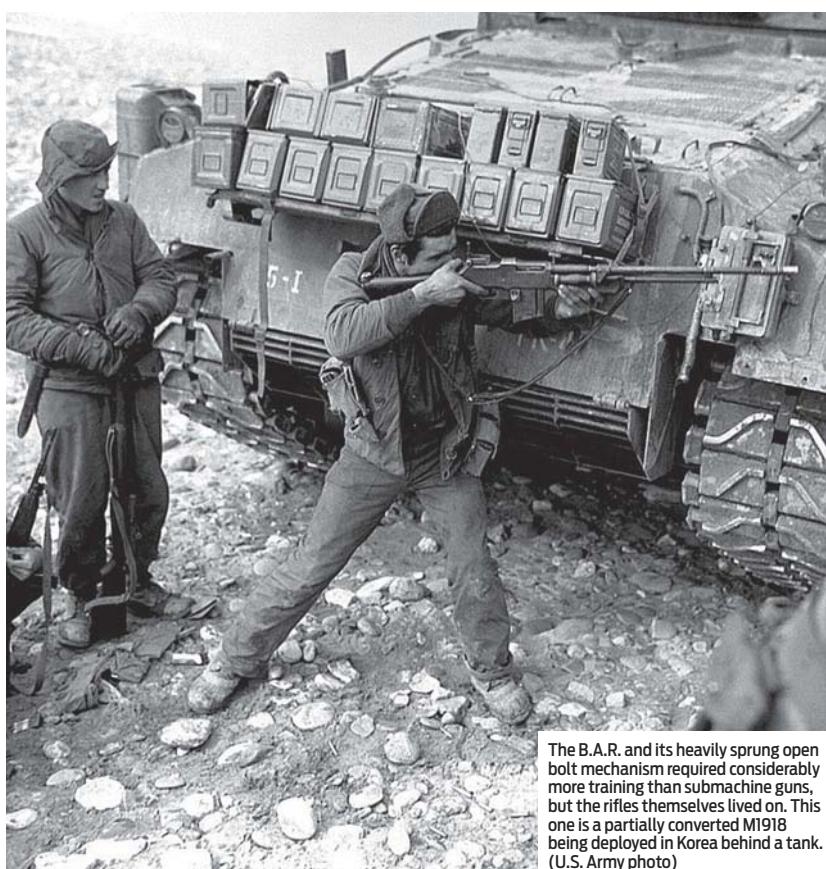
Chinn records the very rare, often thought to be apocryphal Japanese Model of 1932, supposedly delivered in Japanese 7.7x58mm from the Belgian firm and then licensed for further production in the Home Islands. The contracts exist, as do a few blurry photos, but actual sightings are rare.

#### THE B.A.R. IN WW II

The definitive World War II B.A.R. in U.S. service was the Model 1918A2, adopted in 1938. Later, the single strut



In 1945 Okinawa, a Marine with what appears to be a M1918 B.A.R. uses a unique modification of "fire and maneuver," moving out while covered with an M1 Thompson SMG. Normally, the B.A.R. suppressed enemy movement, and the rifleman maneuvered to win. (USMC photo)



The B.A.R. and its heavily sprung open bolt mechanism required considerably more training than submachine guns, but the rifles themselves lived on. This one is a partially converted M1918 being deployed in Korea behind a tank. (U.S. Army photo)

#### FIRING PIN PROBLEMS

Early on, it was found the firing pins broke in prolonged service. This problem was eliminated by using bearing grease on the pins and checking regularly. The current M240/FN MAG/MAG58 series of general purpose machine guns, in fact, uses this mechanism inverted. Grease lubrication and a more robust pin have also been incorporated.

B.A.R. men told me in interviews they got so that they would replace firing pins every few days. One who served in both World War II and Korea advised me that he'd not had a broken one since he started using wheel grease on his guns.

"butt support" (butt stock rest or monopod) was discarded, and early fiber plastic butt stocks and hand guards were introduced. Many, but by no means all, existing military B.A.R.s were revised to that status.

The F.N. Model D with quick-change barrel came along about 1932, and was again available in virtually all applicable rifle calibers, albeit slightly more expensive than the Model 30. The very last production version was in 7.62x51mm NATO as the "DA1", apparently delivered well into the 1960s.

In service, ordnance personnel observed B.A.R.s with inoperable or malfunctioning recoil buffer mechanisms. This was eventually traced to the practice of cleaning the B.A.R. vertically, muzzle up, which allowed cleaning fluid and burned powder to collect in the recoil buffer mechanism.

Additionally, unlike the M1 Garand rifle, the B.A.R.'s gas cylinder was never altered in its duty life to stainless steel. Consequently, gas cylinders frequently rusted solid from the use of corrosive ammunition, especially in humid environments, when not stripped and cleaned regularly and in detail.

Generally, the B.A.R. proved rugged and reliable enough when regularly field stripped and cleaned. Inverted, with a beefed up firing pin, this mechanism is used on the M240/MAG/FN MAG 58 and continues to deliver reliable service and accurate round delivery.

*Jim Thompson is a lifelong student of military arms who has been writing books and articles for more than 30 years .GNSL*



Though the Luger wasn't known as a "gangster" gun, Lugers were prevalent during the era as many were brought home from World War I. Here a Luger is shown in this gangster skit on the *Lucky Bag* television show. (Getty photo)

# AMERICA LOVED THE LUGER

BY JIM DICKSON

**WAR SOUVENIR PISTOLS BECAME TRUSTED  
COMPANIONS BY LAWMEN AND GANGSTERS ALIKE**

**D**uring the Great War, the American soldier had come up against a new German wonder weapon. It was a miraculous pistol that pointed so naturally that anyone could hit with it as easy as pointing a finger. It was also unbelievably accurate and very reliable in the dust and mud of the trenches.

This formidable weapon was the P08 Luger pistol and every German Storm Trooper had one. Its effectiveness in trench warfare was so great that the military wanted that part of history buried because they knew that the days of trench warfare were over, and they did not want the public clamoring for every soldier to be issued a pistol.

American soldiers brought thousands of these pistols back to the U.S. as war souvenirs and it didn't take long for lawmen, outlaws and ordinary citizens of the 1920s to develop a love for this foreign pistol.



The Luger's famous toggle action. (Krieghoff photo)

## LUGER'S ADVANTAGES FOR GANGSTERS

During the era of the gangster, most low-level hoodlums carried whatever gun they could steal. The bootleggers, however, were "in the money" and could afford whatever firepower they desired.

One big advantage of the Luger, and many other semi-autos for that matter, is that they were relatively flat compared to the large revolvers of the day. This made it easier for a gangster to conceal a firearm under his suit or in the pocket of an overcoat.

The greater capacity of the Luger was another feature that could appeal to a gangster. The standard magazine held eight rounds, but there was another option. Jack "Legs" Diamond, the notorious New York bootlegger, was known to have a Luger with a 32-round "snail" drum magazine.

With this magazine, the pistol wouldn't be concealable, but it would offer the ability to launch lots of lead in a hurry, something bootleggers were known to do when shooting it out with rivals and the police. Unfortunately for Legs Diamond, his high capacity Luger didn't prevent him from getting gunned down in Albany, New York, in 1931.



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**"Jack 'Legs' Diamond, the notorious New York bootlegger, was known to have a Luger with a 32-round 'snail' drum magazine."**

## LUGER SEES WIDESPREAD USE

It wasn't just gangsters who embraced the Luger. Many lawmen carried the gun, too, as a way of trying to match the heavily armed gangsters they might confront at any time.

Though many agencies dictated what their officers could carry, that didn't stop Lugers from being carried as "unauthorized" weapons, especially by plain-clothes officers.

The Luger pistols also found widespread acceptance among other segments of the U.S. population. Now everybody could hit with a pistol. Modern technology had finally found a way to automatically boost skill. The Luger became one of the most popular pistols available.

Carrying a concealed weapon without a license was still legal in much of the U.S. in those days, and the Luger saw much use here both as a holster weapon and a pocket pistol.

The pockets of the day were so big and roomy that Colt's famous exhibition shooter, "Fitz" Fitzgerald, always carried a pair of cut down Colt New Service .45 Colt double action revolvers in his pants pockets. That takes up a lot more room than a Luger does. At a mere 30 ounces

## LUGERS NEED STRONG SPRINGS, PROPER AMMO

There were no reliability problems with the Luger in the 1920s and 30s. Most of the ammo was cheap World War I surplus German ammo, which was designed for the Luger, and the practice of clipping a few coils off the Luger magazine spring to make it easier to reload hadn't begun.

The Luger requires an immensely strong magazine spring to feed a cartridge into position for the bolt to carry it into the chamber before the bolt can over ride it and cause a jam. Because the extreme angle of the magazine friction makes the spring 50 percent less effective than a straight, vertical magazine, you need a spring so strong that you need a loading tool to help hold down the follower button on the magazine's side.

The bolt assembly was originally made for the .30 Luger cartridge and is too light for the 9 mm cartridge that Ludwig Lowe of DWM commanded the Luger to be chambered for as an afterthought. He would not permit a larger and heavier bolt assembly to be employed so the Luger needs relatively light loads to keep the light bolt from traveling faster than the magazine can position cartridges for feeding.

Because of the grip angle, the Luger is also quite sensitive to overall cartridge length. Cartridges must be a maximum overall length of 1.180 inches and very little under that is allowable.

Almost all Luger jams can be traced to either insufficient magazine spring strength or improper ammunition. Like the American M16 in Viet Nam, the Luger is very ammunition sensitive.

American gun makers hated the surplus pistols cutting into their sales and, in later years, encouraged gun writers to establish their impartiality by libeling the Luger in print—something no magazine would permit to an advertiser's gun. The big lie that the Luger was unreliable, and they covered themselves with two more brazen lies: "If your Luger is unreliable try hotter ammo. Lugers like hot ammo;" and, "If your Luger magazine is hard to load, just clip a few coils off the magazine spring." No Luger will function reliably under these two conditions, and they knew it.



During World War I, some long-barreled artillery model Lugers were equipped with removable shoulder stocks. (Rock Island Auction Company photo)

The holster for artillery model World War I Lugers included room for the shoulder stock. (Rock Island Auction Company photo)



**“It was a miraculous pistol that pointed so naturally that anyone could hit with it as easy as pointing a finger.”**

the Luger was incredibly lightweight for a service pistol and that made it even more popular for carrying.

Widespread civilian carry by a population that doesn't have to fear unjust arrest and prosecution for defending themselves or others has always been the solution to violent crime and the Luger did its part in keeping America safe. Finally having a pistol that they could really hit with encouraged more people to depend on a pistol and that made a criminal's job much more dangerous.

#### WHAT TO FEED A HUNGRY LUGER

The ammunition makers also avoided making ammo tailored to the Luger's needs in many cases. Browning design pistols like a strong initial recoil impulse, where the Luger prefers a slower push. This is achieved by different burning rate powders for each gun. American ammunition makers concentrated on the faster burning powders best suited for Browning type pistol actions.

Today the best powder for reloaders to use in Lugers is Red Dot shotgun powder. The 4.1 grains of Red Dot with a 115-grain bullet will give 997 fps for World War I Lugers, and 3.9 grains of Red Dot with a 124-grain bullet will give 1,025 fps for World War II Lugers. Winchester standard velocity primers are best because they are a bit tougher and less likely to be pierced by the Luger's sharp firing pin.



Country folk found that they could hit a marauding fox in the hen house more easily with the Luger than any other pistol and it was a lot easier to carry around than a shotgun. Shooting livestock and crop raiding pests is part of farming and ranching, and the easy-pointing Luger expanded the capabilities of the pistol for many.

Out West it quickly became a favorite of the cowboys. One bragged that his Luger was the only pistol he had ever had that would shoot through an oak wagon tongue. The Luger was a perfect fit in the standard cowboy chaps pockets of the day, and many were simply carried there. These are the worst pockets in the world for collecting dirt and grit but it never stopped the Luger from functioning.

### ONE OF THE ALL-TIME BEST

The truth is that the Luger is one of the top 10 most reliable pistols in the world. The No. 1 place is held by the M1911, but the Luger made the top 10. No gun is ever given a proper test with unsuitable ammo and damaged springs. In the 1920s and 30s, the Luger was given what it required and performed flawlessly. It was one of the favorite pistols of the day.

*Jim Dickson has written for the gun magazines in 12 countries for nearly 30 years. GNSL*

### LUGERS PRIZED BY U.S. SOLDIERS

Most Americans were pistol shooters in this era, and once they got their hands on a Luger, they were enthralled with the ease of hitting with it. The Luger became the most prized war trophy of both World Wars, and in World War I nobody was trying to stop the troops from bringing a pistol back home with them at the war's end. Doughboys that couldn't get a Luger in their own sector eagerly traded with British and French troops for one of the prized pistols. The result was a flood of Luger into America at the war's end.



The Luger disassembled.  
(Krieghoff photo)

# FULL-AUTO OUTLAWED

BY THOMAS C. TABOR

HOW GANGSTER VIOLENCE  
RESULTED IN THE NATIONAL  
FIREARMS ACT OF 1934



Silencers on firearms were among the things that were restricted as a result of the 1934 NFA. Here actor Paul Dubov portrays a gangster in the film, "The Purple Gang." (Getty photo)



**D**evasion is what the Great Depression brought to the United States. The stock market crashed, personal income was depleted by 50 percent and unemployment was sent skyrocketing to the record high of 25 percent.

But while the vast majority of the citizenry suffered in a state of controlled silence during this period, a few individuals chose a different path. The result was the development of a new generation of murderous gangsters.

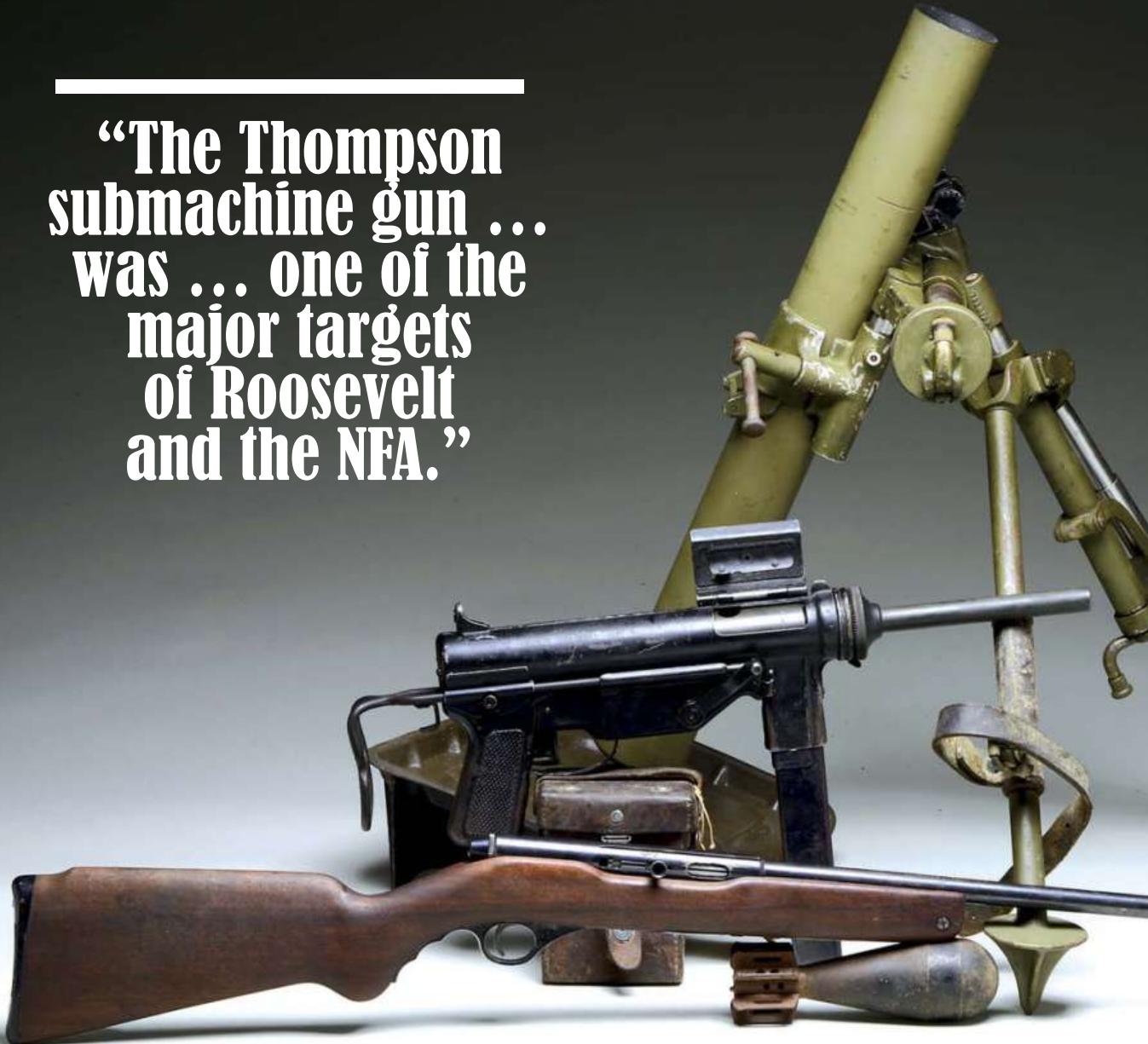
Some of the best known and most notorious included John Dillinger, Al Capone, Baby Face Nelson, Machine Gun Kelly, Pretty Boy Floyd, and Bonnie and Clyde. The ensuing bloody aftermath of the crime sprees perpetrated by those individuals and the many other lesser-known cutthroats brought the media flocking to the crime scenes like vultures drawn to rotting carrion.

And frequently for the sake of advancing careers, much of the coverage that followed was highly publicized and overly dramatized to the point that it only added further to the public's fear and chaos.

Fearing the political consequences of not being able to curtail the lawlessness, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, with the assistance of his Attorney General Homer Cummings, took action in the form of Roosevelt's "New Deal for Crime."

“The Thompson submachine gun ... was ... one of the major targets of Roosevelt and the NFA.”

Photo Credit James D. Julia, Inc. photo



## THE PRESIDENT ACTS

At the heart of that declaration was the nation's very first attempt at controlling the private ownership of firearms—the National Firearms Act (NFA) of 1934.

Roosevelt must have felt an intense desire to ban those weapons favored by the gangsters and mobsters, but he knew well that the Second Amendment of the Constitution protected the right of the people to keep and bear arms. He feared an all-out attempt to ban them would certainly run into formidable opposition.

Consequently he chose to take a backdoor approach to the problem by attempting to tax those weapons out of existence, a method still favored by

many politicians today as a way of curtailing the use and ownership of the things they personally feel are undesirable.

## WEAPONS AFFECTED

As originally written, the statute primarily focused on all fully automatic weapons, any shotgun with a barrel less than 18 inches in length, any rifle with a barrel less than 16 inches in length and any rifle or shotgun with an overall length of less than 26 inches.

For the most part, handguns and revolvers were exempt from those taxes as long as their barrels contained some form of rifling inside. There were also restrictions on the use and ownership of silencers, devices that the administra-

### WEAPONS AFFECTED BY THE NFA OF 1934

1. Fully automatic weapons
2. Any shotgun with a barrel less than 18 inches in length or with an overall length of less than 26 inches
3. Any rifle with a barrel less than 16 inches in length or with an overall length of less than 26 inches
4. Restrictions on the use and ownership of silencers
5. Destructive devices: explosives, missiles, poison gases, firearms greater than .50 caliber (other than shotguns)
6. Improvised and disguised firearms

All of these post-gangster era weapons --the mortar, the M3 Grease Gun and the silencer on the rifle -- are restricted under the NFA.



The Thompson submachinegun was a desirable weapon for those on both sides of the law. Here actor Robert Stack portrays federal agent Eliot Ness in the 1950's TV series, "The Untouchables." (Getty photo)

## FAST FACTS ON THE TOMMY GUN

### 1 NICKNAMES

The Thompson sub-machine gun was sometimes referred to as the Annihilator, the Tommy Gun, Trench Broom and sometimes even the Chicago Typewriter.

### 2 NO. 1?

The Tommy wasn't the preferred weapon of choice by all of the gangsters of the era. Nevertheless it was a weapon of considerable popularity by many of those hooligans and one of the major targets of Roosevelt and the NFA.

### 3 SPECS, CONCEALABILITY

At only about 10 pounds in weight and less than 3 feet long, a Thompson could easily be hidden from view, frequently inside a folded newspaper. The newspapers of that era were considerably larger than today's papers and, as such, provided an excellent way of hiding such a gun.

### 4 A SYMBOL

Being capable of a barrage of fully automatic .45 caliber gunfire, sending bullets to its victim at a rate of 800 rounds per minute, the Thompson made a very formable weapon. It is generally recognized as the symbol of the American gangster era.

### 5 THE BACKGROUND

Production of the Thompson began in 1921, a year after Prohibition took effect in the country, which dovetailed nicely with the efforts of the bootlegging gangsters.

### 6 THE MASSACRE

The infamous St. Valentine's Day Massacre in 1929 was the violent work of a Thompson and certainly resulted in spurring the desire to control its distribution and use. That incident, the many bank robberies and police officer killings all helped to intensify the political efforts to push through the NFA as did the public's then apathy toward the right of gun ownership. Though the National Rifle Association (NRA) had been existence for decades before the passage of the bill, it didn't have the public backing and lobbying clout that the association enjoys today.

tion had classified as being "destructive" and/or "explosive" in nature, and a catch-all category called the "Any Other Weapon" (AOW), which focused on improvised and/or disguised firearms. That category of the legislation was met to focus on such weapons as zip guns, wallet guns, cane guns, knife guns, pen guns and the like.

### THE TAX

At the heart of the bill was its \$200 levied tax, which was applied to the ownership and/or transfer of any of those weapons. Though that amount may not seem all that substantial by today's standards, during the Depression and for the decades to follow it resulted in essentially making ownership



The Thompson submachine gun came along too late for World War I, but saw military service in World War II. In between, it built an infamous reputation in the hands of gangsters. (Getty photo)

## KEY '34 NUMBERS

**200**

**In dollars, the amount of the tax that was applied to the ownership and/or transfer of any of the weapons**

**2,000**

**In dollars, the amount of the fine for anyone found guilty of violating any portion of the NFA**

**5**

**In years, the maximum imprisonment for anyone violating the law**

unrealistic for most individuals.

Once the tax had been paid, a stamp was issued by the commissioner as proof of compliance to the law. To further drive their point home, anyone found guilty of violating any portion of the NFA would be charged with a felony, fined \$2,000 and be open to imprisonment for up to five years.

## GANGSTERS DYING OUT

But while such heavy-headed penalties likely kept those weapons out of law-bidding citizens' hands, they must have done little to deter the actual gangsters from their evil deeds. Those crimes frequently were so violent that if any of the participants were captured alive they would have in all likelihood wound up facing the gallows or the gas chamber anyway. Under those circumstances, an additional penalty of a few



The Thompson submachine gun was one of the main weapons targeted by the NFA of 1934. (James D. Julia, Inc. photo)

#### OWNING A FULLY AUTO WEAPON TODAY

There is a process in which you can sometimes own Class III weapons—weapons banned by the NFA—manufactured before May 1986 and silencers. It involves getting fingerprinted and photographed, filling out BATF Form 4 and getting the chief law enforcement officer in your area to sign off on it, going through a background check and, of course, paying the \$200 tax. You still have to comply with the applicable laws in your state, and many states prohibit these weapons.



Collectors are still able to purchase antique Thompson submachine guns if they comply with the rigid set of federal regulations and paperwork and are in compliance with laws in their home states. (Getty photo)

years in prison and a fine paled in comparison to those other consequences.

But most of the gangsters of the '30s died anyway as the result of lead poisoning in the form of law enforcement gunfire. One exception was Machine Gun Kelly (also known unflatteringly as Pop Gun Kelly), who was captured and wound up serving out the remainder of his life behind bars, dying in Leavenworth Prison in 1954 on his 59th birthday.

#### OBJECTIONS TO THE LAW

After the NFA was passed and implemented, several lawsuits were filed claiming that the statue did indeed violate the Second Amendment of the Constitution. One of those cases actually

reached the Supreme Court and involved two men (Jack Miller and Frank Layton) that had been arrested for transferring a Stevens 12-gauge double barrel shotgun having a barrel less than 18 inches in length.

The charges were first appealed in the federal court, resulting in a ruling that NFA did, in fact, violate the Second Amendment. From there, however, it went on to the Supreme Court, which quashed the appeal by a unanimous decision [*Miller v. United States*, 307 U.S. 174, 59 S. Ct. 816, 83 L. Ed. 1206 (U.S. Ark. 1039)].

#### STILL IN EFFECT

The NFA remains in effect today, codified in amended form at 26 USCA §

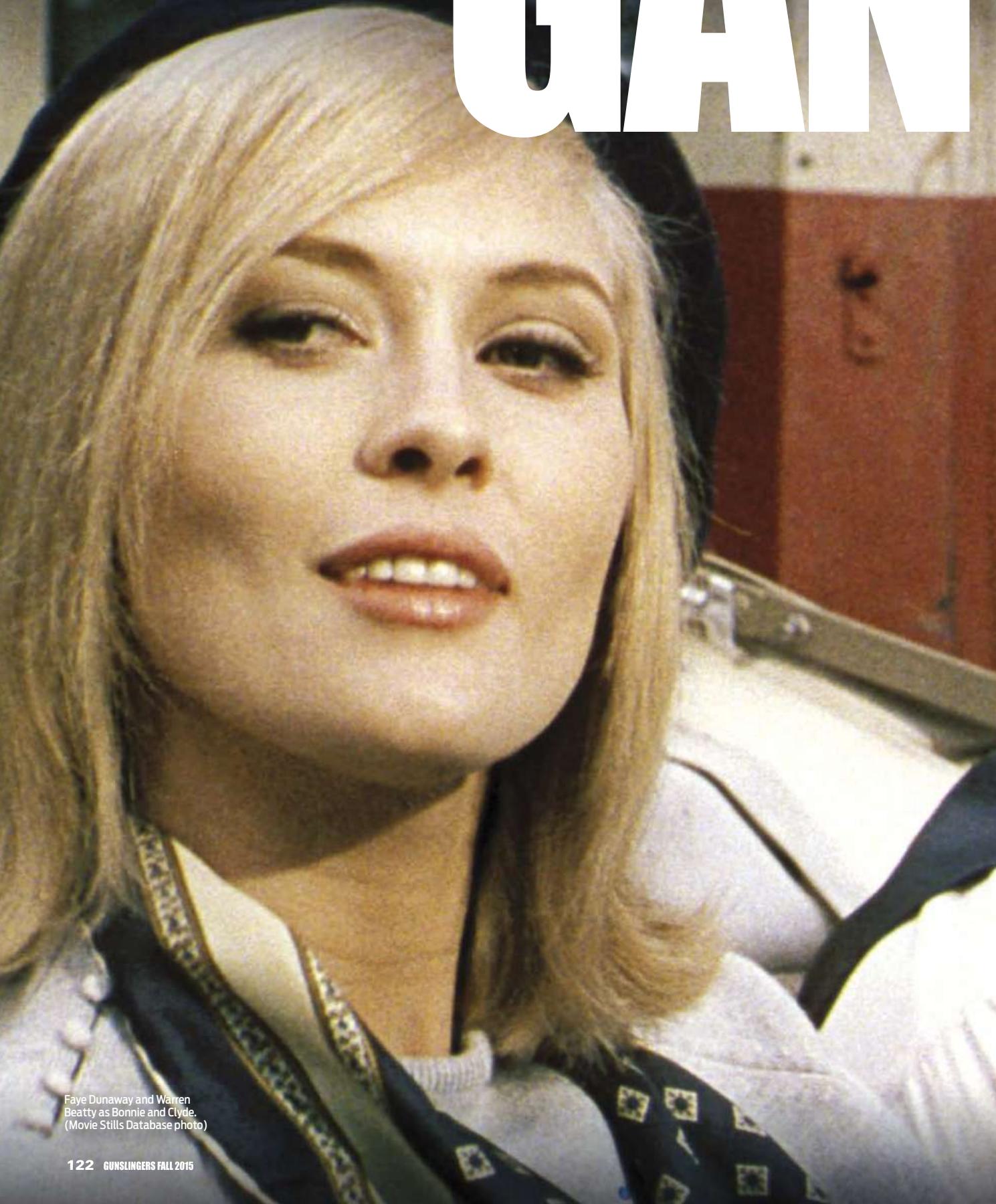
5801 et. seq. and holds the distinction of being the first federally mandated gun-control legislation. That statue was instrumental in forming the building blocks for subsequent gun legislation.

In some areas, inroads have been made in the private use and ownership of such things as silencers, but the vast majority of the original requirements of NFA, including the restrictions on fully automatic weapons and short barrels, remain in effect to this day.

*Thomas C. Tabor has published approximately 900 articles worldwide. He recently published his first book, "Shooter's Bible Guide to the Hunting Rifle and Its Ammunition."*  
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BUYER'S GUIDE

# GAN

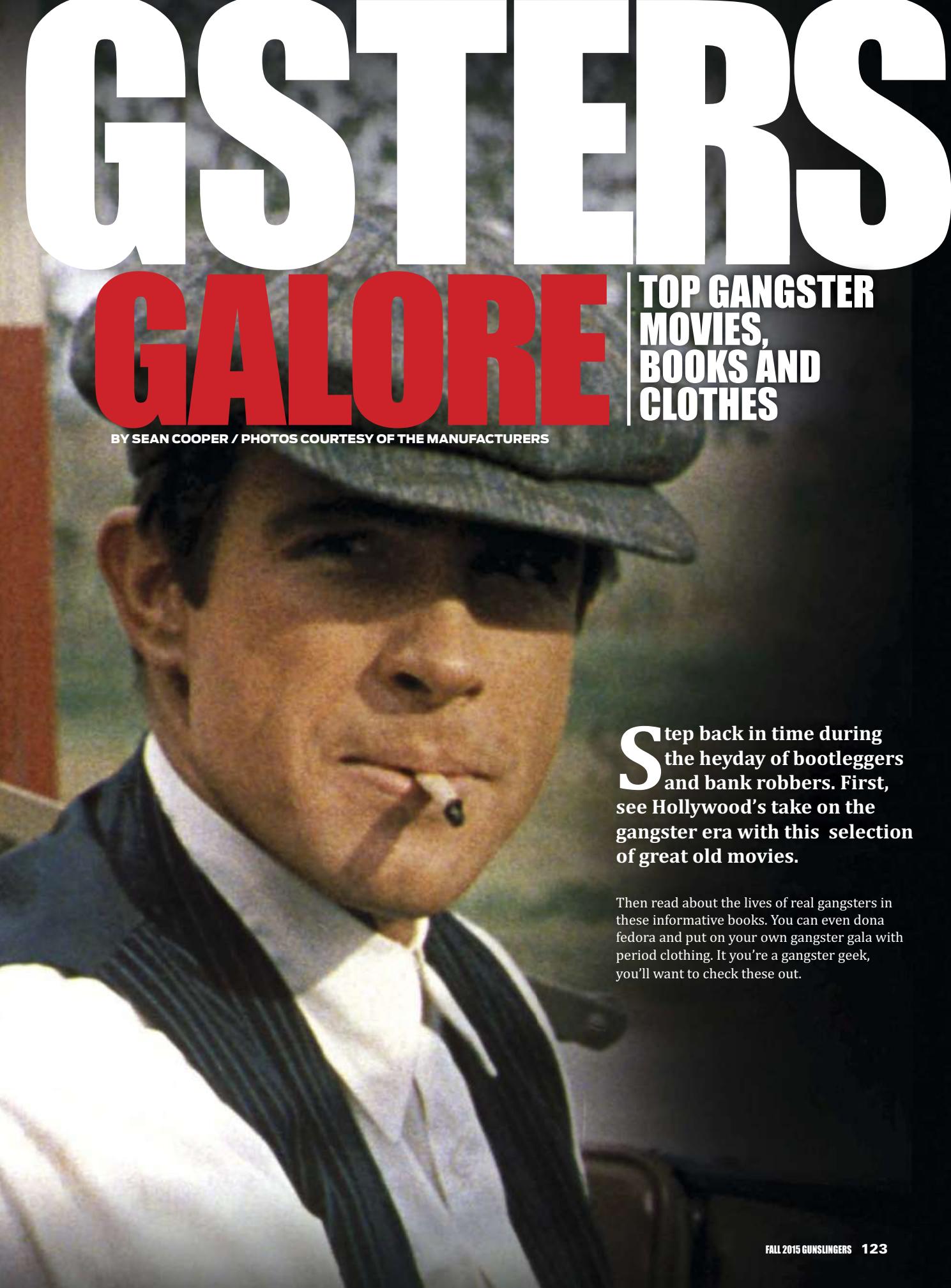


Faye Dunaway and Warren  
Beatty as Bonnie and Clyde.  
(Movie Stills Database photo)

# GANGSTERS GALORE

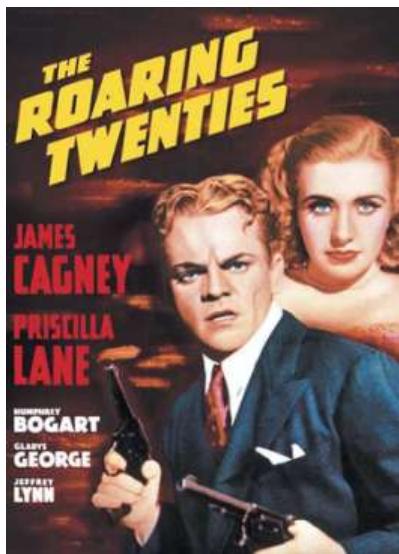
TOP GANGSTER  
MOVIES,  
BOOKS AND  
CLOTHES

BY SEAN COOPER / PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURERS



Step back in time during the heyday of bootleggers and bank robbers. First, see Hollywood's take on the gangster era with this selection of great old movies.

Then read about the lives of real gangsters in these informative books. You can even don a fedora and put on your own gangster gala with period clothing. If you're a gangster geek, you'll want to check these out.

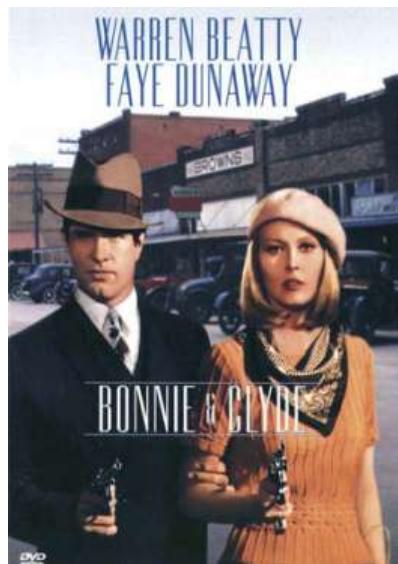


**"The Roaring Twenties"**  
(1939, Warner Bros.)

Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Description: James Cagney and Humphrey Bogart star in this action-packed crime drama set in the roaring 1920s about two deadly gangster rivals who gets pulled into the alluring world of smuggling bootleg whiskey into New York during Prohibition. Available on DVD and Blu-Ray.

**Price: \$6.99**

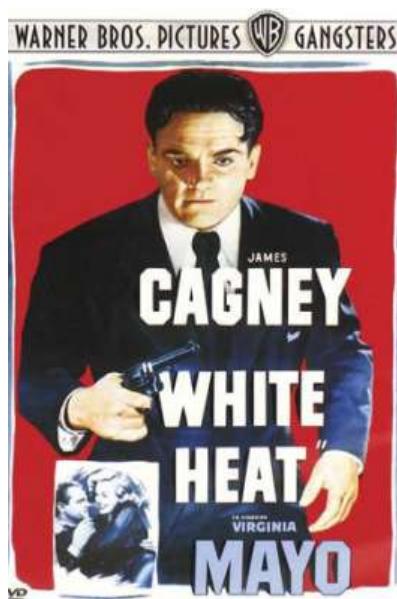


**"Bonnie and Clyde"**  
(1967, Warner Bros.)

Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Description: Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway star as the most notorious gangster couple, Bonnie and Clyde. When Clyde steals a car, he ends up with more than he bargained for when he ends up with Bonnie. The two go on a crime spree, but tension between the two could end their lucrative crime partnership. Available on DVD and Blu-Ray.

**Price: \$14.99 (DVD),  
\$13.89 (Blu-Ray)**

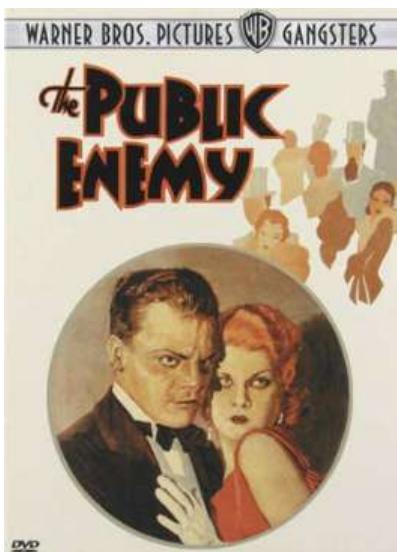


**"White Heat"**  
(1949, Warner Bros.)

Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Description: James Cagney plays gang leader Cody Jarrett. To help stop Jarrett's crime spree, the authorities plant an undercover agent played by Edmond O'Brien who attempts to bring Jarrett to justice once and for all. Available on DVD and Blu-Ray.

**Price: \$6.99 (DVD),  
\$12.70 (Blu-Ray)**

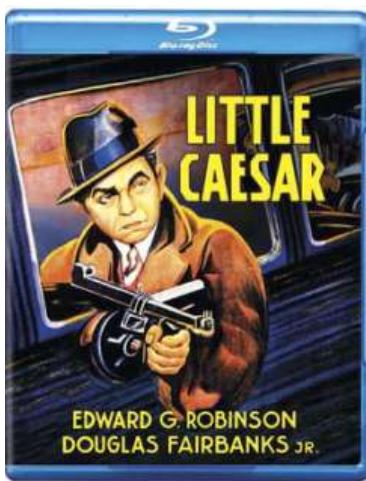


**"The Public Enemy"**  
(1931, Warner Bros.)

Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Description: "The Public Enemy" is widely regarded as the film role that put James Cagney on the map. The movie looks at the rise and fall of gangster Tom Powers during the Prohibition era. It follows his roots from his childhood to his journey as a rootless gangster. Available on DVD and Blu-Ray.

**Price: \$12.30 (DVD), \$9.68  
(Blu-Ray)**



**"Little Caesar"**  
(1931, Warner Bros.)

Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Description: "Little Caesar" is a gritty crime drama that takes place in gangster-era Chicago. Caesar "Rico" Bandello (Edward G. Robinson) and his buddy Joe Massara (Douglas Fairbanks Jr.) go down different paths in life. Caesar chooses a life of crime, while Massara chooses to work in business. Available on DVD and Blu-Ray.

**Price: \$8.11 (DVD), \$19.98  
(Blu-Ray)**

Edward G.  
Robinson in "Little  
Caesar" from 1931.  
(Movie Stills  
Database photo)



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**“G Men”**  
(1935, Warner Bros.)

Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Description: In “G Men,” New York City lawyer Brick Davis (James Cagney) is bedfellows with local mobster “Mac” MacKay (William Harrigan). But when Davis’ close friend is gunned down, Davis becomes a G Man himself to bring the criminals to justice. Available on DVD.

**Price: \$5.44**

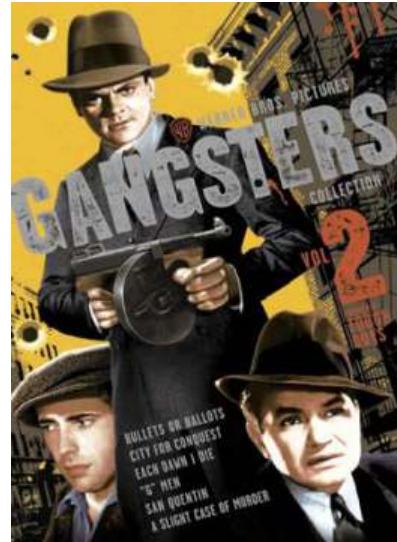


**“The Petrified Forest”**  
(1936, Warner Bros.)

Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Description: This gangster era movie is an adaption of the same-named Robert E. Sherwood play about a drifter, waitress and infamous mobster who all cross paths. The film is named after the Petrified Forest region in Arizona, where the patrons of a diner are held hostage by gangster Duke Mantee (Humphrey Bogart). Available on DVD and Blu-Ray.

**Price: \$13.89 (DVD),  
\$12.96 (Blu-Ray)**



**“Warner Gangsters Collection, Vol. 2”**  
(2008, Warner Bros.)

Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Description: With “Warner Gangsters Collection, Vol. 2,” you get six classic gangster movies for the price of one. Included on this disc set are “Bullets or Ballots,” “City for Conquest,” “Each Dawn I Die,” “G Men,” “San Quentin” and “A Slight Case of Murder.” Available on DVD.

**Price: \$12.69**

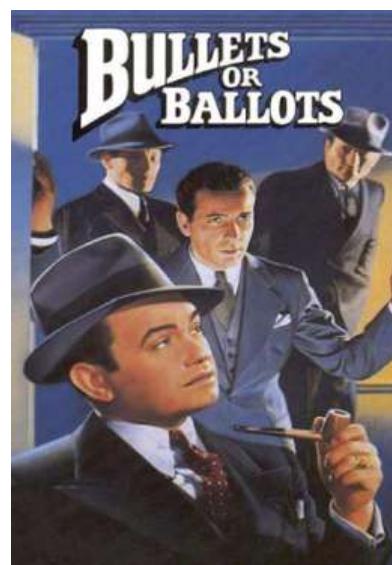


**“TCM Greatest Classic Gangsters: Edward G. Robinson”**  
(2012, Turner Classic Movie)

Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Description: At the bargain basement price of \$9.99, it's hard to beat this DVD boxset. It features four classic gangster films from the 1930s and 1940s. Included in the set are “The Little Giant” (1933), “Bullets Or Ballots” (1936), “Kid Galahad” (1937) and “Larceny Inc.” (1942). Available on DVD.

**Price: \$9.99**



**“Bullets or Ballots”**  
(1936, Warner Home Video)

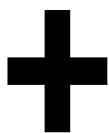
Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Description: “Bullets or Ballots” is a classic gangster movie involving a former investigating detective Johnny Blake (Edward G. Robinson) going under cover to infiltrate a notorious gang led by Al Kruger (Baron MacLane). Humphrey Bogart plays the suspicious henchman Bugs Fenner. Available on DVD.

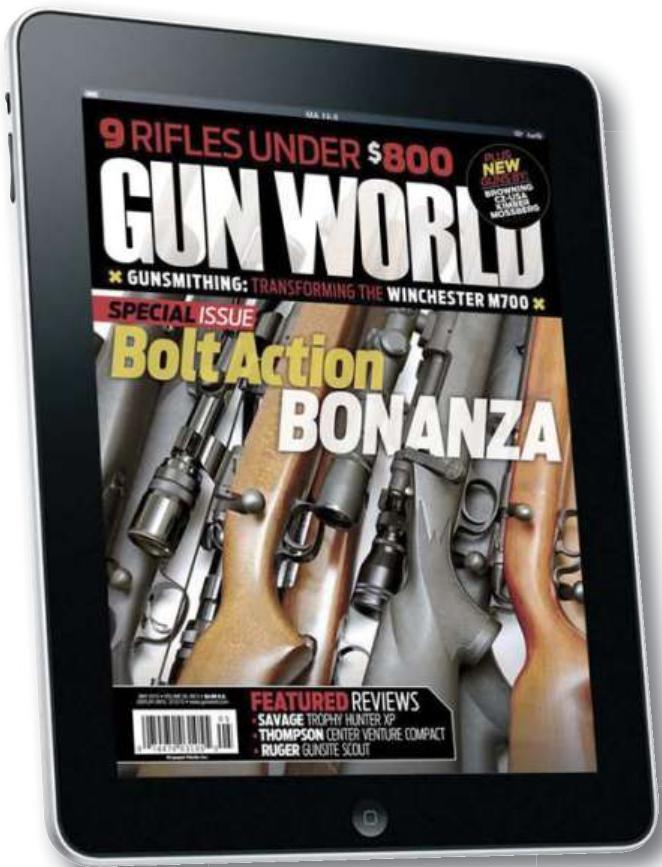
**Price: \$5.42**

“You can even don a fedora and put on your own gangster gala...”

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### Gangster Fedora Hat

Source: [www.baileyhats.com](http://www.baileyhats.com)

Description: This fedora-style hat was popular with the most notorious gangsters, including the likes of Al Capone, Bugsy Siegel and John Dillinger. It has a distinctive front pinch and wide brim with a feather accent over a wide grosgrain band and bow.

**Price: \$90.00**



### Crase Fedora Hat

Source: [www.baileyhats.com](http://www.baileyhats.com)

Description: If you didn't fancy the first fedora, how about trying a white one on for size? The Crase is a fedora handcrafted in the U.S. Not only is it water repellent, but it's also durable and flexible. Any gangster around during the Prohibition period would be proud to wear this high-quality hat.

**Price: \$150.00**



### Double-Breasted Suit

Source: [www.contemposuits.com](http://www.contemposuits.com)

Description: Nothing says 1920s gangster era style clothing more than a double-breasted suit. With this stylish white suit, you'll help bring vintage back in style. This high-quality suit features a six-button double-breasted jacket and double pleated baggy pants made of wrinkle resistant Poly fabric.

**Price: \$149.99**



### Quick Change Gangster/Flapper Costume

Source: [www.halloweencostumes.com](http://www.halloweencostumes.com)

Description: Get two sexy 1920s flapper costumes for one low price. Made from breathable 100 percent polyester interlock knit fabric. When you're ready to switch costumers, peel down the black and white pinstriped gangster dress to reveal a pink flapper dress. Includes dress, neck tie, bow pin, shoulder straps and more.

**Price: \$38.99**

### Adult Six-Button Double-Breasted Gangster Costume

Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Description: Why dress up as a ghost or goblin for Halloween when you can channel your inner gangster instead? Show up to a Halloween party in style in this vintage red and black pinstripe suit. Be sure to pick up a black fedora and replica gangster gun to finish up this stellar costume.

**Price: \$69.99**





CAPONE, DILLINGER, BONNIE & CLYDE, NELSON  
by CHARLES RIVER EDITORS

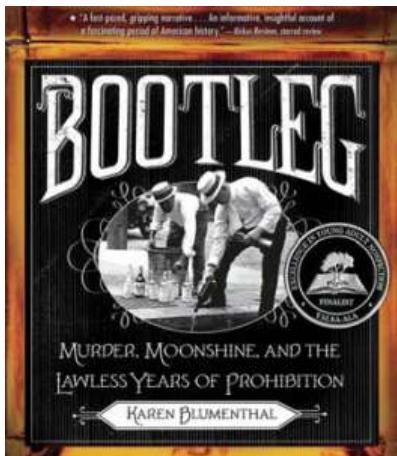
**“Public Enemies:**  
Al Capone, John Dillinger,  
Bonnie & Clyde, and  
Baby Face Nelson”

(2013, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform)

Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Description: “Public Enemies” looks at the rise and fall of the biggest gangsters of the Prohibition period: Al Capone, John Dillinger, Bonnie & Clyde, and Baby Face Nelson. The book, by the writers at Charles River Editors, looks at the legends and myths in an effort to separate fact and fiction.

**Price: \$9.03**



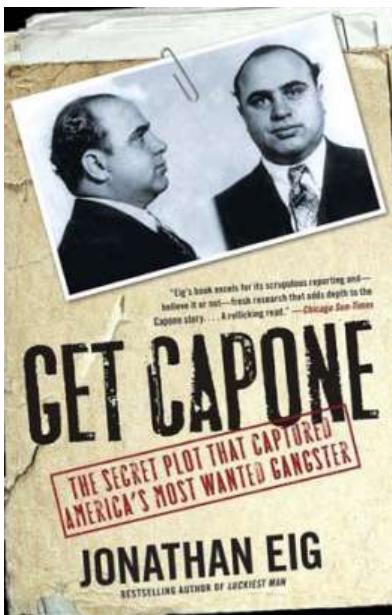
**“Bootleg:**  
Murder, Moonshine, and the Lawless Years of Prohibition”

(2013, Square Fish)

Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Description: Mobsters, guns and politics – this novel has it all and more. This isn't your typical boring non-fiction novel. The author, Karen Blumenthal, presents the real life stories in a compelling way that will keep you on the edge of your seat. Prohibition was supposed to make America better—instead it let gangsters call the shots.

**Price: \$15.92 (hardcover), \$10.73 (paperback)**



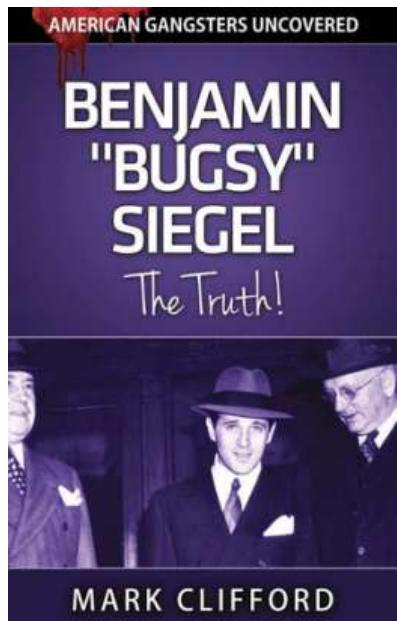
**Get Capone:**  
The Secret Plot That  
Captured America's Most Wanted  
Gangster

(2011, Simon & Schuster)

Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Description: Written by Jonathan Eig, “Al Capone” is arguably the most notorious mobster of the Prohibition period. Even if you're not a fan of gangsters, surely you've heard of him. This book looks at the true story of how the federal government took down America's most notorious gangster. Newly released government documents show how “Scarface” was finally taken down.

**Price: \$11.64**



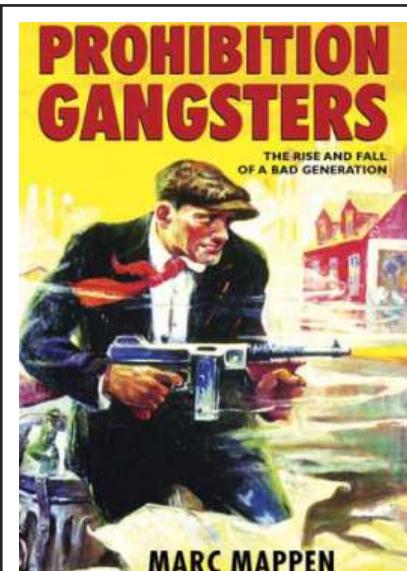
**“Benjamin ‘Bugsy’ Siegel - The Truth!**  
(American Gangsters  
Uncovered Book 5”)

(2015, Shaharm Publications)

Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Description: Bugsy Siegel was a mobster of the Prohibition era who gained notoriety not just for the crimes he committed, but for his lust of gambling as well. This novel, written by Mark Clancy, looks at the life and times of Siegel. You'll learn how he rose to power to be one of the biggest crime kingpins in history.

**Price: \$2.91 (Kindle)**



**“Prohibition Gangsters:**  
The Rise and Fall of a  
Bad Generation”

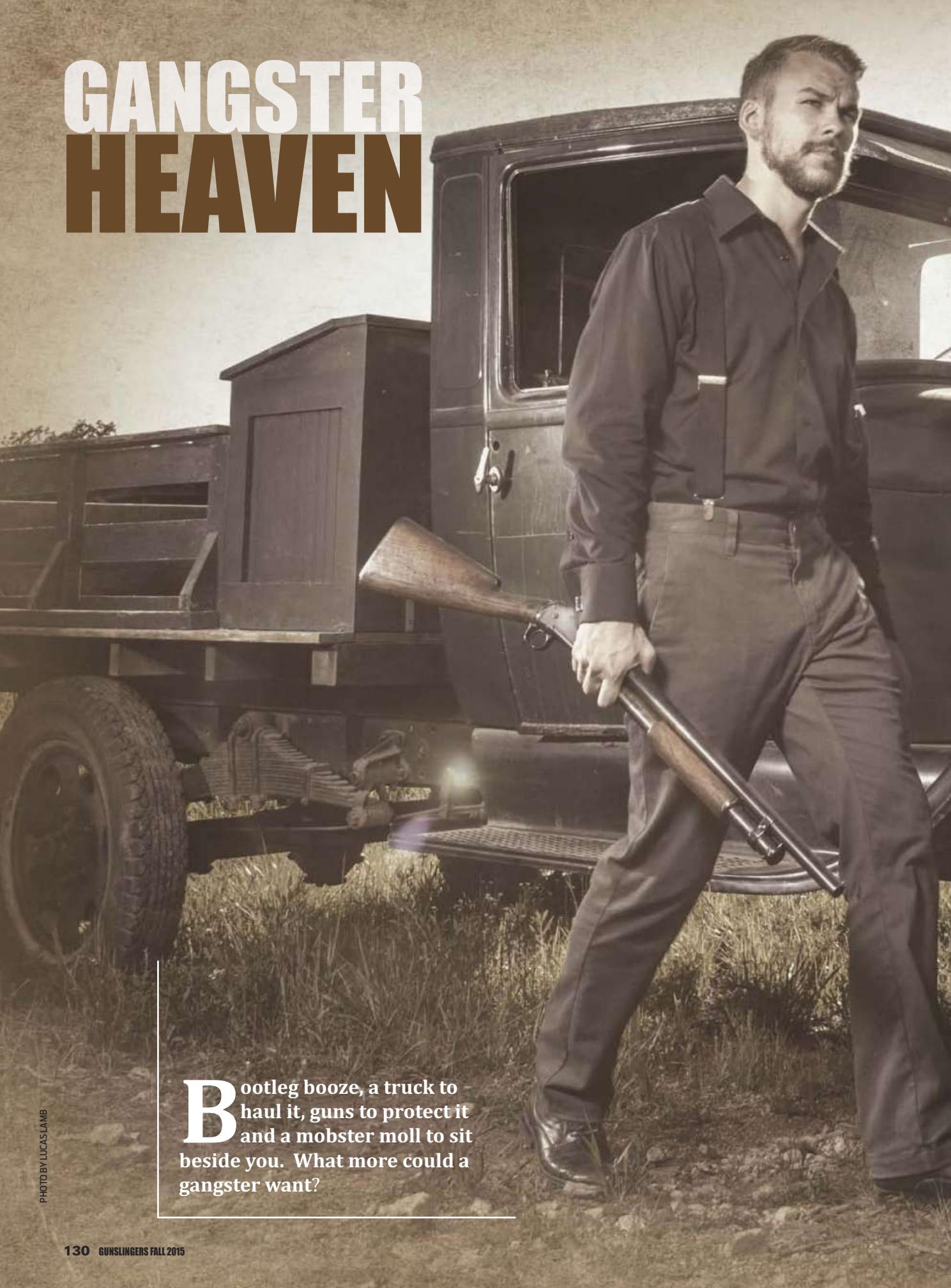
(2013, Rutgers University Press)

Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Description: Jan. 16, 1920, will forever be known as a day that changed America forever. It was the day that the 18th Amendment to the Constitution went into effect in U.S., banning the sale of alcohol. Skilled story teller Marc Mappin looks at notorious mobsters like Al Capone, Lucky Luciano, Dutch Schultz, Legs Diamond and Nucky Johnson who skirted Prohibition and the letter of the law for criminal gain.

**Price: \$18.93 (hardcover), \$21.88 (paperback)**

# GANGSTER HEAVEN



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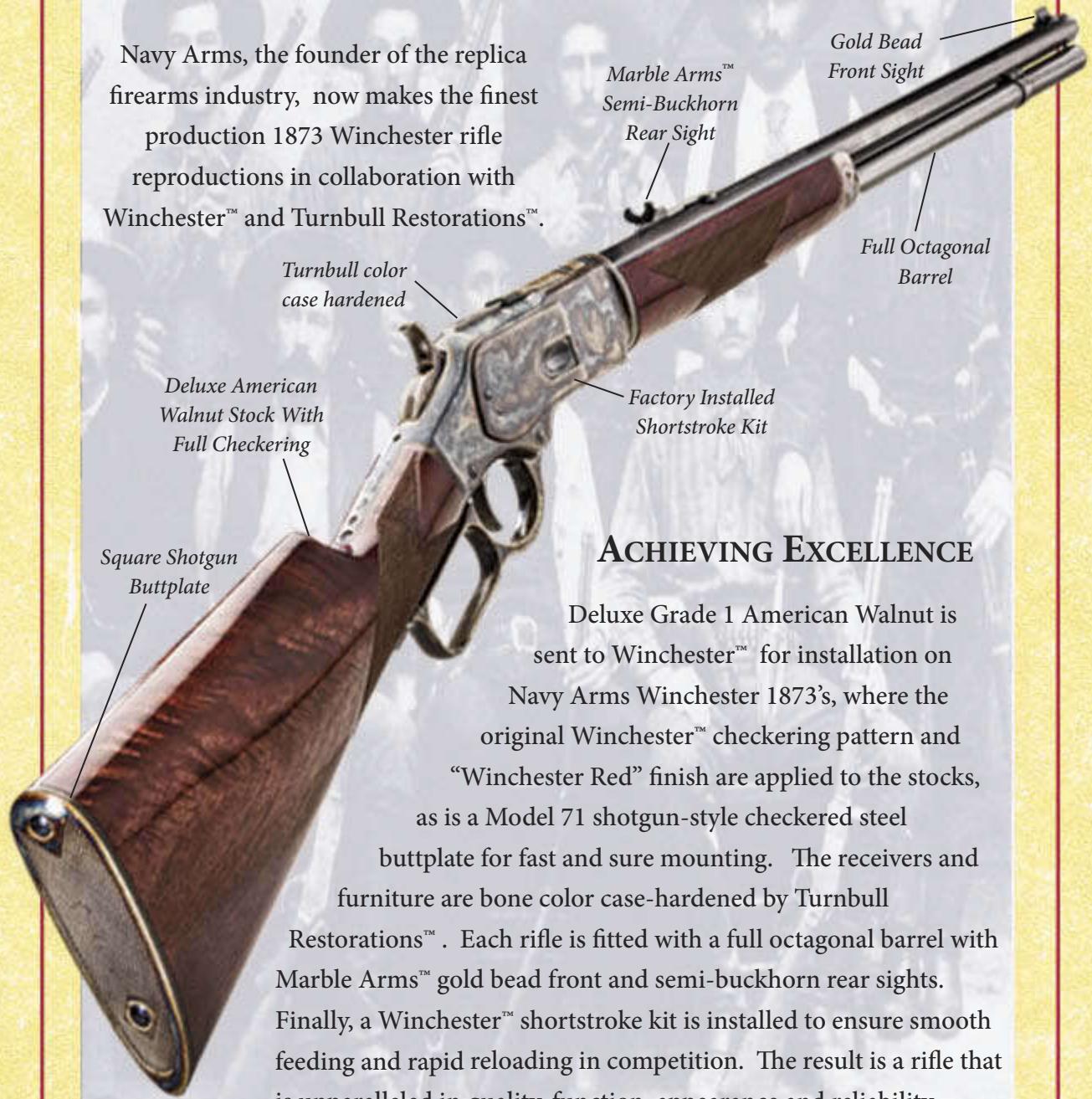


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